JIM CORBETT

VERRIER ELWIN

SÁLIM ALI

THE ILLUSTRATED LIVES IN THE WILDERNESS

Three Classic Indian Autobiographies

With an Introduction by RAMACHANDRA GUHA

OXFORD

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THE ILLUSTRATED
LIVES IN THE WILDERNESS

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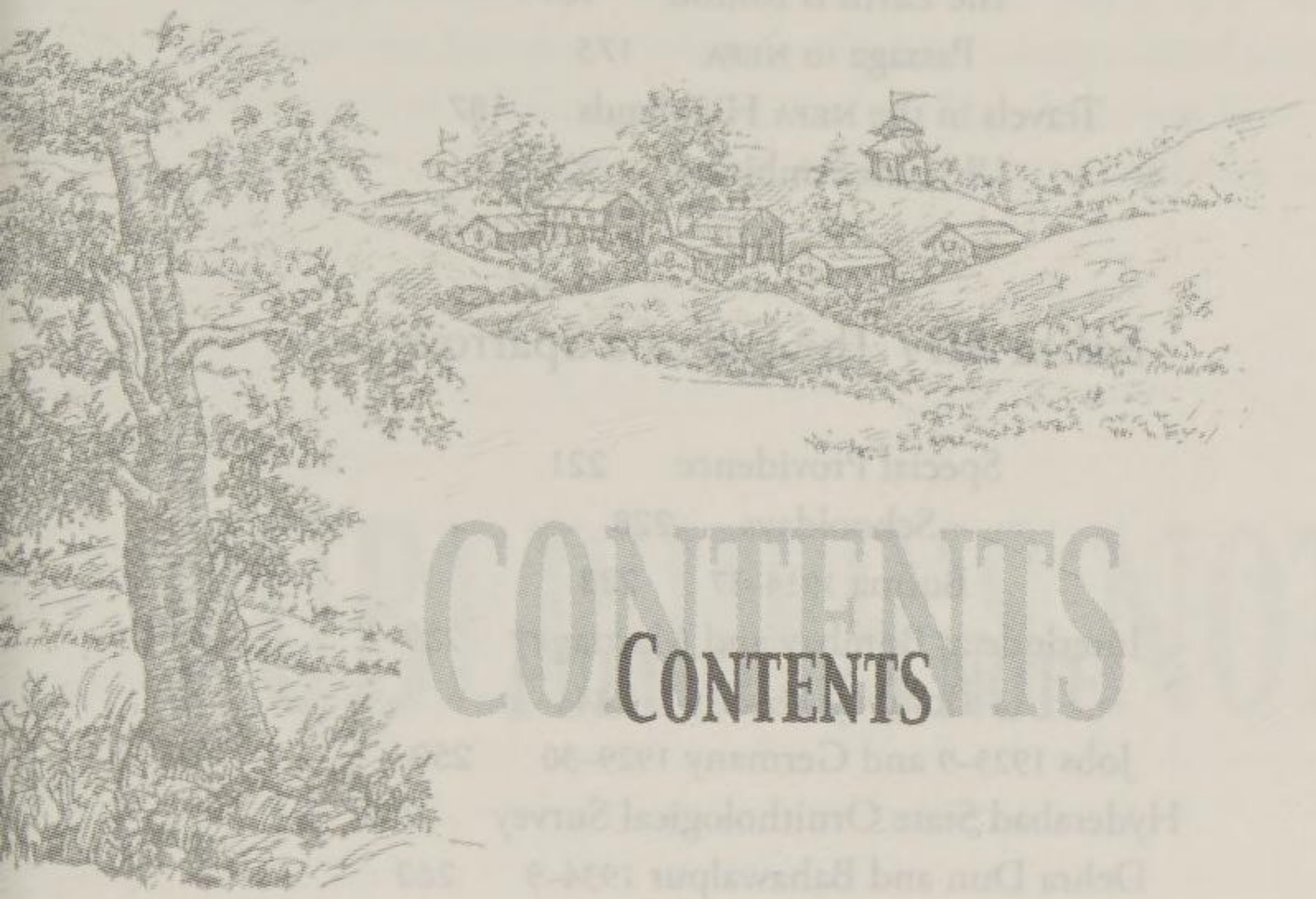

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Publisher's Note

Lives in the Wilderness (1999)—comprising *My India* (1952), *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964), and *The Fall of a Sparrow* (1985)—was notable for its spotlighting of relatively neglected aspects of Indian life. Drawing from this classic omnibus, this illustrated edition showcases the life stories of Jim Corbett, Verrier Elwin, and Sálim Ali in an appealing new format.

Producing enduring books on nature, environment, conservation, and wildlife for both scholarly and lay readers has always been an important aspect of OUP's publishing programme. From the early 1940s—Verrier Elwin's books began appearing starting with *The Muria and Their Ghotul* in 1943; in 1945, Jim Corbett submitted *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*; while Sálim Ali's *Indian Hill Birds* was published in 1949—OUP has brought out pioneering and original works which have, in different ways, redefined our outlook on India, her people, her flora and fauna.

With gradual loss in number of wild animals in sanctuaries and national parks across the country, we are looking at ways to reduce human-animal conflict. Corbett, Elwin, and Ali have addressed the issue in their writings since the 1950s, and many of their books continue to

be in print even today. This illustrated edition—the timeless appeal of the original books together with the evocative visuals and easy-to-read format—will, we hope, reinforce their enduring message to a wider audience, including younger readers.

Introduction

Ramachandra Guha

Indo-Anglian autobiography is dominated by the triumvirate of Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Nirad Chaudhuri. The second was inspired by the first, the last provoked by the other two. Gandhi's experiments were first narrated in Gujarati, but it is the English version (translated by Mahadev Desai, and published almost simultaneously) that has made its mark down the ages. Nehru's autobiography was written as confirmation of his status as the likely successor to Gandhi as leader of the Indian freedom movement. Chaudhuri's autobiography was, among other things, a statement of defiance, its title a means to an ironic distancing from the books of those manifestly public and globally famous Indians.

All three works were written in middle age. Gandhi's appeared in book-form when he was fifty-nine, Nehru's when he was forty-seven, Chaudhuri's when he was fifty-four. The autobiographer had a substantial reservoir of experience to draw upon, and more to look forward to. The books are also united by a shared tone: a curious if characteristically Indian combination of the reflective and the pedagogic. Gandhi's book is aimed in the first instance at the middle class and uncertainly patriotic Indian, whereas Nehru's reach is more international. (*The Experiments with Truth* was originally serialized in the

Mahatma's own journal, *Young India*, while *An Autobiography* was first published in London in 1936, to be read by the European torn between fascism and democratic socialism.) Gandhi's meditations are biased inwards, Nehru's outwards. Yet consider how in both works the career of the individual is so inseparably interwoven with the career of Indian nationalism.

Nirad Chaudhuri has never acknowledged that his own book was written in the shadow of those by Gandhi and Nehru. His admirers will probably reject the suggestion on the grounds that his autobiography is intensely personal (politics enters more centrally in its long delayed sequel, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*). But the connections are not hard to make, or to sustain. A thinker detested by Chaudhuri, Karl Marx, once wrote that 'men make their own history, but not in the circumstances of their choosing'. This could well have served as an epitaph for *An Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, a book which shows how an individual is shaped by history yet able to (partially) transcend it. In Chaudhuri, as indeed in Gandhi and Nehru, the hope is that the reader will be inspired and educated by the experiences, errors, judgements and actions of the autobiographer. But the teachings are addressed also to oneself. The autobiographer knows that he is not done with life yet. Might he not, in the years that remain, implement with more certainty the credo that he has so strenuously worked out?

Three books do not make a 'tradition'. One might, however, contrast these works with what I shall with more authority call the Western tradition of autobiography. The Western autobiographer does not have to wait till middle age to take up his pen. *A Precocious Autobiography* is the title of a book written in the 1960s by the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. A few years later Dom Moraes (always European by sensibility and, at the time, also British by nationality) published his memoirs, *My Son's Father.* He too was less than thirty. Long before Yevtushenko and Moraes, Robert Graves had emerged from the trenches of the First World War to write his *Goodbye to All That.*

The arrogance of these accounts is affecting. Poets, it seems, know all about life as soon as they have fought their first war or divorced their first wife. At the other pole of the Western tradition are the memoirs written in the evening of life. These latecomers are more likely to be scientific men, who turn to autobiography when their real work is done.

Among the great works of this type are those written by Charles Darwin, Bertrand Russell and Benjamin Franklin.

Western autobiographies, whether precocious or ripe, tend to more closely scrutinize the self. They can be self-absorbed and simultaneously self-deprecatory. Society is generally kept at a safe distance. There is little effort to hand out lessons. By contrast, the Indian autobiographer is solemn. For all their worth, one cannot recall a witty remark or a joke well told in the autobiographies of Gandhi, Nehru and (it must be said) Chaudhuri.

II

To the trinity discussed above this Omnibus offers a lesser trinity of Indo-Anglian autobiographies. Lesser, but not necessarily less readable.

Let me take them in order of appearance. Jim Corbett's *My India* was published in 1952, when its author was seventy-seven. The book is not so much a conventional autobiography as a collection of incidents in the life of the great hunter, placed alongside portraits of men and women he knew. It was written as Corbett prepared to migrate to Kenya which, unlike India, was then still under British rule. Before he went he left behind, in print, fragments of the land he had loved. Beyond its literary purpose the book aims also to pre-empt the imminent nationalist erasure of all that the white man did in and especially for India. Of course *My India* has many heroes, and not all of them are white. But the presentation compels one to seek out among them, the policeman Freddy Young*, for his courage, humour and devotion to duty.

The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography appeared twelve years later. When he began to write the book Elwin was sixty, and the victim already of two heart attacks. He knew he had not long to live (in fact the book was published three months after his death). Elwin deliberately set about recording the details of his life before a biographer could. There is thus a satisfying completeness about the narrative, which runs from the cradle almost to the pyre. The focus is on his work for the tribal communities of India, among whom he lived for thirty years and of whose culture he became the foremost interpreter. People, incidents,

* This edition does not include the story 'Sultana: India's Robin Hood' in which Freddy Young appears.

campaigns and books are all described with care and detail. There remains in his book a political purpose, which is very nearly the reverse of Corbett's. The shikari had sought, albeit indirectly, to memorialize the Empire. The anthropologist, on the other hand, shows how it is possible to subordinate one's Englishness to the claims of Gandhian nationalism. He had even wished to call his book *Autobiography of a British-born Indian.*

Sálim Ali's *The Fall of a Sparrow* was published in 1985. He was then eighty-seven. As a 'last' work it shares some of the characteristics of the Western scientific memoir. The ornithologist knew that his days of original research had passed, much as Russell recognized, when he wrote his autobiography, that he had nothing more to offer to philosophy or social theory. The scientist could, however, recount with affection how the experiments had been conducted and the books written. In his search for new species Sálim Ali cut through a wide swathe of the subcontinent, from the arid highlands of Ladakh to the humid tropical forests of Kerala. *The Fall of a Sparrow* recollects those travels of thirty and forty years ago with a warm nostalgia. The book is remarkable for the absence of even a whiff of politics. Sálim Ali had lived fifty years as the subject of an alien empire and nearly forty as a citizen of a free nation. But unlike Corbett or Elwin he sought neither to apologize for the British nor to justify the Indians. His background may explain this silence. He came from one of the most distinguished of Bombay families, which had produced an early President of the Indian National Congress as well as one of the first 'native' members of the Indian Civil Service. Sálim Ali could partake without any fuss both of Indian nationalism and Western culture. Why bother to declare a preference for one or the other?

The work of Corbett, Elwin, and Ali is notable for its spotlighting of aspects of Indian life for the most part neglected by historians, journalists, anthropologists, novelists, and autobiographers. For the classic opposition of literature and politics in India, as elsewhere in the modern world, is between City and Village. Gandhi wished to reground Indian political life in the countryside, Nehru to bring the best of science and industry to the peasant, Chaudhuri to move from the village to the world of civilization as embodied by the city. Their preoccupation with this polarity was completely reproduced by their contemporaries. One might write of the clash between the two domains, or how each is

marked by a distinctive set of morals, attitudes, and lifestyles. One might loudly declare a preference for one over the other. But, as with Gandhi, Nehru or Chaudhuri, one could not escape the basic opposition of the westernizing City and the caste-and-tradition-bound Hindu Village.

Our three authors, by contrast, wrote of a Third India, which lay beyond the first two. Thus in his ethnographies Elwin brought to wider attention the poetry and ways of life of people separated from a Hindu civilization which noticed them only to patronize. Sálim Ali wrote more than twenty books about the non-human residents of the Indian landscape, birds in particular. This thematic obsession, of tribals in the one case and of birds in the other, also dominates their respective autobiographies. In this respect Jim Corbett's *My India* is at a slight angle to his other works. In books such as *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* and *Jungle Lore* he had written with rich insight and deep intimacy about the wild animals of the forest. In the memoir the balance between man and animal is roughly even. But taking his oeuvre as a whole, the humans are seen to make a late and even apologetic entry.

The three works printed together here were all written very late in the lives of their authors. That alone distinguishes them from the holy trinity of Indo-Anglian autobiography. So, more decisively, does their style. These are works of enchantment and discovery, not personal victories disguised as political testaments. There is always an innocent wonder about these accounts. Unlike Gandhi or Chaudhuri these men did not turn prematurely grey. One will not read their autobiographies for insights into Indian nationalism or Western civilization. The India of their books is more appealing if sometimes slightly less worthy than the India of Gandhi and Nehru. What shines through is a love of natural beauty and cultural diversity. So does a completely unselfconscious humility. One could read these three books and still not know for certain that Verrier Elwin was a great pioneering anthropologist, that Sálim Ali was (with the exception only of C.V. Raman) the finest scientist produced by India, that Jim Corbett was the most accurate marksman this side of the Suez.

III

It remains for me to say a word or two about the person common to all three books. He is explicitly acknowledged in *The Fall of a Sparrow*, as its dedicatee. He peeps in and out of *The Tribal World*, once as a caring

host, again as a conscientious proof-reader. He is mentioned not at all in *My India*, although he contributed a great deal to that book as well.

After graduating from Oxford, R.E. Hawkins came to India in 1930 to teach. But the college he was to join was closed in sympathy with Gandhi's non-co-operation movement, so Hawkins went to Oxford University Press instead. For thirty years he ran OUP's India operations. As one of his successors has written, 'although the OUP had been established here in 1912, much of the credit for strengthening its foundations and making it into an enduring first-rate publishing house goes to Hawkins'.

In one way or another R.E. Hawkins helped make our three writers. Himself a keen naturalist, Hawkins must have met Sálim Ali through the Bombay Natural History Society. At a time when Indian ornithology was the exclusive preserve of European officials Sálim Ali had written a new, updated account of the birds of the subcontinent. He was not white; worse, he did not even have a bachelor's degree. This did not stop Hawkins from publishing *The Book of Indian Birds* in 1941. The work went into multiple editions: OUP published them all, not to speak of all the other books by the same author. By the time Sálim Ali's last work was published Hawkins had retired. But its dedication acknowledged that without him there might never have been a first.

Hawkins also played a formative role in the rise to literary stardom of Jim Corbett. In 1943 Corbett wrote to OUP from the Kumaon hills, offering some shikar stories for publication. The covering letter indicated that he hoped they would be read by army officers and other outdoorsmen. The publisher had higher or, shall we say, more material ambitions. When the stories, considerably revised, were published as *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* they were read in places other than the Sahranpur Infantry Officers Mess. The book became a worldwide best-seller, was translated legally into a dozen languages, and illegally into another half-dozen (those published behind the Iron Curtain). It was even distorted into a Hollywood film. Prodded by Hawkins, Corbett wrote a very successful series of such books and, finally, the memoir *My India.* All his books are making the OUP money still.

Hawkins and Elwin were friends long before they became publisher and author. Both lived on the margins of white society in India. The sahibs never knew quite what to make of them. Were they, or were they not, paid-up members of the Club? Both were attracted by

Gandhi's spiritualism but repelled sometimes by his sanctimoniousness. They wore khadi but also liked their whisky. Both experimented, unsuccessfully, with brahmacharya.

In the mid-thirties Elwin had published four books with John Murray in London. Then came the war, and paper shortages in England. In 1940 Hawkins adroitly asked Elwin to switch allegiance to the OUP. For the next twenty-five years the relationship continued, to great mutual profit. OUP was to publish all but one of Elwin's major ethnographies and folklore collections. The bonds, both personal and professional, were deep and lasting. Although Jonathan Cape in the UK and Alfred Knopf in the US each expressed an interest in publishing his autobiography, Elwin chose finally to put friendship above pecuniary gain, staying with the OUP for his last book.

As I have said, the name of R.E. Hawkins does not appear in *My India*. It is casually mentioned in *The Tribal World*, although one must have access to the OUP archives in Mumbai to appreciate how much the editor contributed to the printed book. And one can be certain that if Hawkins had still been General Manager of OUP *The Fall of a Sparrow* would have been dedicated to somebody else. How different are the times we live in. No autobiography, it seems, can now go out into the world without extended and equal acknowledgement of the role played by the author's agent, partner, editor and dog.

My India

JIM CORBETT

Jim Corbett (1875–1955), India's most famous hunter of man-eaters, was a pioneer in many respects—a hunter par excellence with over a dozen man-eaters (thought to have taken more than 1500 lives) to his name, and a committed conservationist who helped establish India's first national park, subsequently named after him. Corbett was also a consummate storyteller whose adventurous and perceptive tales have not only entertained and captivated a whole generation of readers, but also opened their eyes to the cause of the environment.

If you are looking for a history of India, or for an account of the rise and fall of the British raj, or for the reason for the cleaving of the subcontinent into two mutually antagonistic parts and the effect this mutilation will have on the respective sections, and ultimately on Asia, you will not find it in these pages; for though I have spent a lifetime in the country, I lived too near the seat of events, and was too intimately associated with the actors, to get the perspective needed for the impartial recording of these matters.

In my India, the India I know, there are four hundred million people, ninety per cent of whom are simple, honest, brave, loyal, hard-working souls whose daily prayer to God, and to whatever Government is in power, is to give them security of life and of property to enable them to enjoy the fruits of their labours. It is of these people, who are admittedly poor, and who are often described as 'India's starving millions', among whom I have lived and whom I love, that I shall endeavour to tell in the pages of this book, which I humbly dedicate to my friends, the poor of India.

Kunwar Singh

KUNWAR SINGH WAS BY CASTE A THAKUR, AND THE HEADMAN OF Chandni Chauk village. Whether he was a good or a bad headman I do not know. What endeared him to me was the fact that he was the best and the most successful poacher in Kaladhungi, and a devoted admirer of my eldest brother Tom, my boyhood's hero. Kunwar Singh had many tales to tell of Tom, for he had accompanied him on many of his *shikar* expeditions, and the tale I like best, and that never lost anything in repetition, concerned an impromptu competition between brother Tom and a man by the name of Ellis, whom Tom had beaten by one point the previous year to win the B.P.R.A. gold medal for the best rifle-shot in India.

Tom and Ellis, unknown to each other, were shooting in the same jungle near Garuppu, and early one morning, when the mist was just rising above the tree tops, they met on the approach to some high ground overlooking a wide depression in which, at that hour of the morning, deer and pig were always to be found. Tom was accompanied by Kunwar Singh, while Ellis was accompanied by a *shikari* from Naini Tal named Budhoo, whom Kunwar Singh despised because of his low caste and his ignorance of all matters connected with the jungles. After the usual greetings, Ellis said that, though Tom had beaten him by one miserable point on the rifle range, he would show Tom that he was a

better game shot; and he suggested that they should each fire two shots to prove the point. Lots were drawn and Ellis, winning, decided to fire first. A careful approach was then made to the low ground, Ellis carrying the ·450 Martini-Henry rifle with which he had competed at the B.P.R.A. meeting, while Tom carried a ·400 D.B. express by Westley-Richards of which he was justly proud, for few of these weapons had up to that date arrived in India.

The wind may have been wrong, or the approach careless. Anyway, when the competitors topped the high ground, no animals were in sight on the low ground. On the near side of the low ground there was a strip of dry grass beyond which the grass had been burnt, and it was on this burnt ground, now turning green with sprouting new shoots, that animals were to be seen both morning and evening. Kunwar Singh was of the opinion that some animals might be lurking in the strip of dry grass, and at his suggestion he and Budhoo set fire to it.

When the grass was well alight and the drongos, rollers, and starlings were collecting from the four corners of the heavens to feed on the swarms of grasshoppers that were taking flight to escape from the flames, a movement was observed at the farther edge of the grass, and presently two big boar came out and went streaking across the burnt ground for the shelter of the tree jungle three hundred yards away. Very deliberately Ellis, who weighed fourteen stone, knelt down, raised his rifle and sent a bullet after the hindmost pig, kicking up the dust between its hind legs. Lowering his rifle, Ellis adjusted the back sight to two hundred yards, ejected the spent cartridge, and rammed a fresh one into the breach. His second bullet sent up a cloud of dust immediately in front of the leading pig.

This second bullet deflected the pigs to the right, bringing them broadside on to the guns, and making them increase their speed. It was now Tom's turn to shoot, and to shoot in a hurry, for the pigs were fast approaching the tree jungle, and getting out of range. Standing four-square, Tom raised his rifle and, as the two shots rang out the pigs, both shot through the head, went over like rabbits. Kunwar Singh's recital of this event invariably ended up with: 'And then I turned to Budhoo, that city-bred son of a low-caste man, the smell of whose oiled hair offended me, and said, "Did you see that, you, who boasted that your *sahib* would teach mine how to shoot? Had my *sahib* wanted to blacken the face of yours he would not have used two bullets, but would have killed

both pigs with one".' Just how this feat could have been accomplished, Kunwar Singh never told me, and I never asked, for my faith in my hero was so great that I never for one moment doubted that, if he had wished, he could have killed both pigs with one bullet.

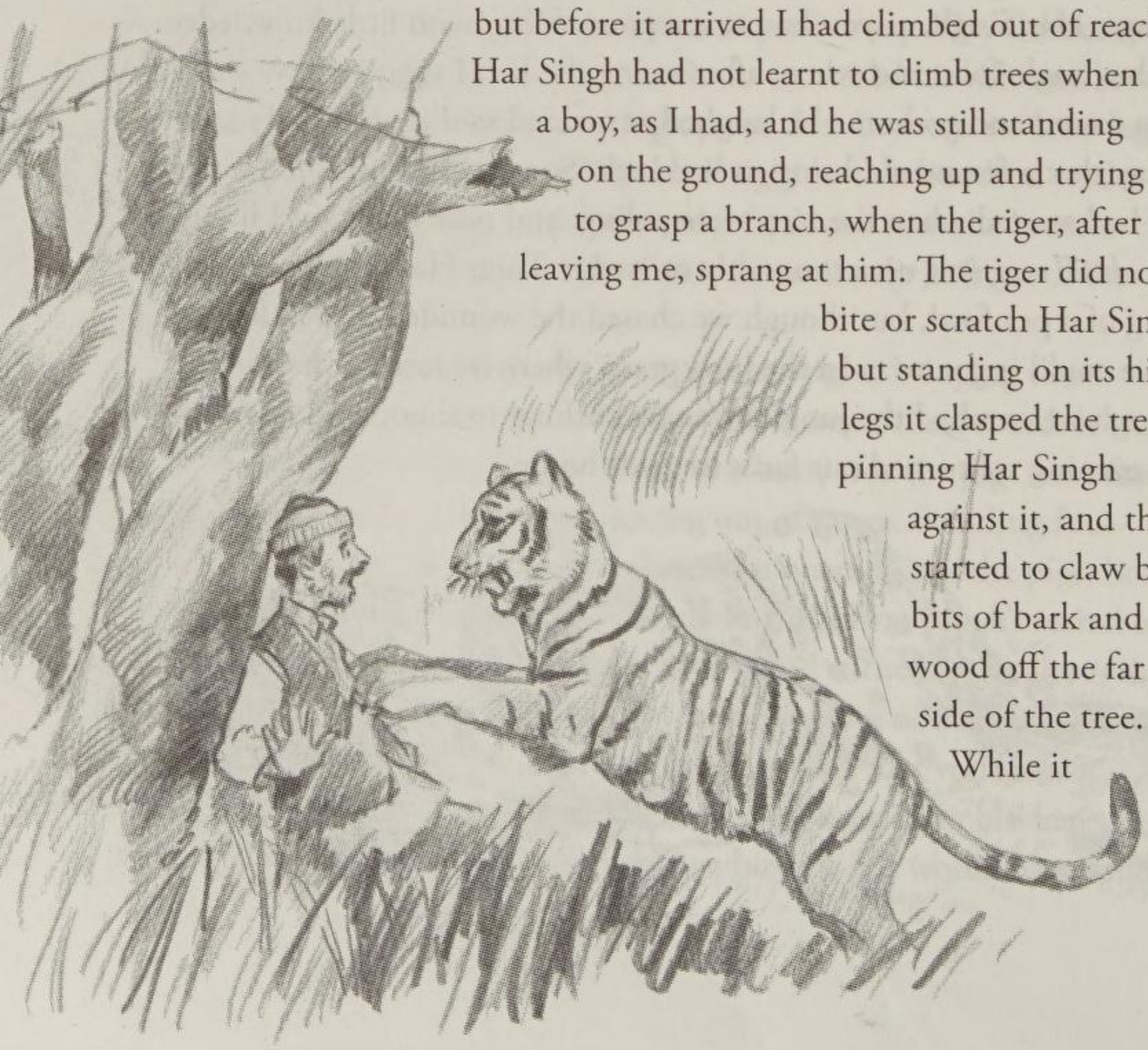
Kunwar Singh was the first to visit me that day of days when I was given my first gun. He came early, and as with great pride I put the old double-barrelled muzzle-loader into his hands he never, even by the flicker of an eyelid, showed that he had seen the gaping split in the right barrel, or the lappings of brass wire that held the stock and the barrels together. Only the good qualities of the left barrel were commented on, and extolled; its length, thickness, and the years of service it would give. And then, laying the gun aside, he turned to me and gladdened my eight-year-old heart and made me doubly proud of my possession by saying: 'You are now no longer a boy, but a man; and with this good gun you can go anywhere you like in our jungles and never be afraid, provided you learn how to climb trees; and I will now tell you a story to show how necessary it is for us men who shoot in the jungles to know how to do so.

'Har Singh and I went out to shoot one day last April, and all would have been well if a fox had not crossed our path as we were leaving the village. Har Singh, as you know, is a poor *shikari* with little knowledge of the jungle folk, and when, after seeing the fox, I suggested we should turn round and go home he laughed at me and said it was child's talk to say that a fox would bring us bad luck. So we continued on our way. We had started when the stars were paling, and near Garuppu I fired at a *chital* stag and unaccountably missed it. Later Har Singh broke the wing of a pea fowl, but though we chased the wounded bird as hard as we could it got away in the long grass, where we lost it. Thereafter, though we combed the jungles we saw nothing to shoot, and towards the evening we turned our faces towards home.

'Having fired two shots, and being afraid that the forest guards would be looking for us, we avoided the road and took a sandy *nullah* that ran through dense scrub and thorn-bamboo jungle. As we went along talking of our bad luck, suddenly a tiger came out into the *nullah* and stood looking at us. For a long minute the tiger stared and then it turned and went back the way it had come.

'After waiting a suitable time we continued on our way, when the tiger again came out into the *nullah*; and this time, as it stood and looked at us, it was growling and twitching its tail. We again stood quite still, and after a time the tiger quietened down and left the *nullah*. A little later a number of jungle fowl rose cackling out of the dense scrub, evidently disturbed by the tiger, and one of them came and sat on a *haldu* tree right in front of us. As the bird alighted on a branch in full view of us, Har Singh said he would shoot it and so avoid going home empty handed. He added that the shot would frighten away the tiger, and before I could stop him he fired.

'Next second there was a terrifying roar as the tiger came crashing through the brushwood towards us. At this spot there were some *runi* trees growing on the edge of the *nullah*, and I dashed towards one while Har Singh dashed towards another. My tree was the nearer to the tiger, but before it arrived I had climbed out of reach. Har Singh had not learnt to climb trees when a boy, as I had, and he was still standing on the ground, reaching up and trying to grasp a branch, when the tiger, after leaving me, sprang at him. The tiger did not bite or scratch Har Singh, but standing on its hind legs it clasped the tree, pinning Har Singh against it, and then started to claw big bits of bark and wood off the far side of the tree. While it

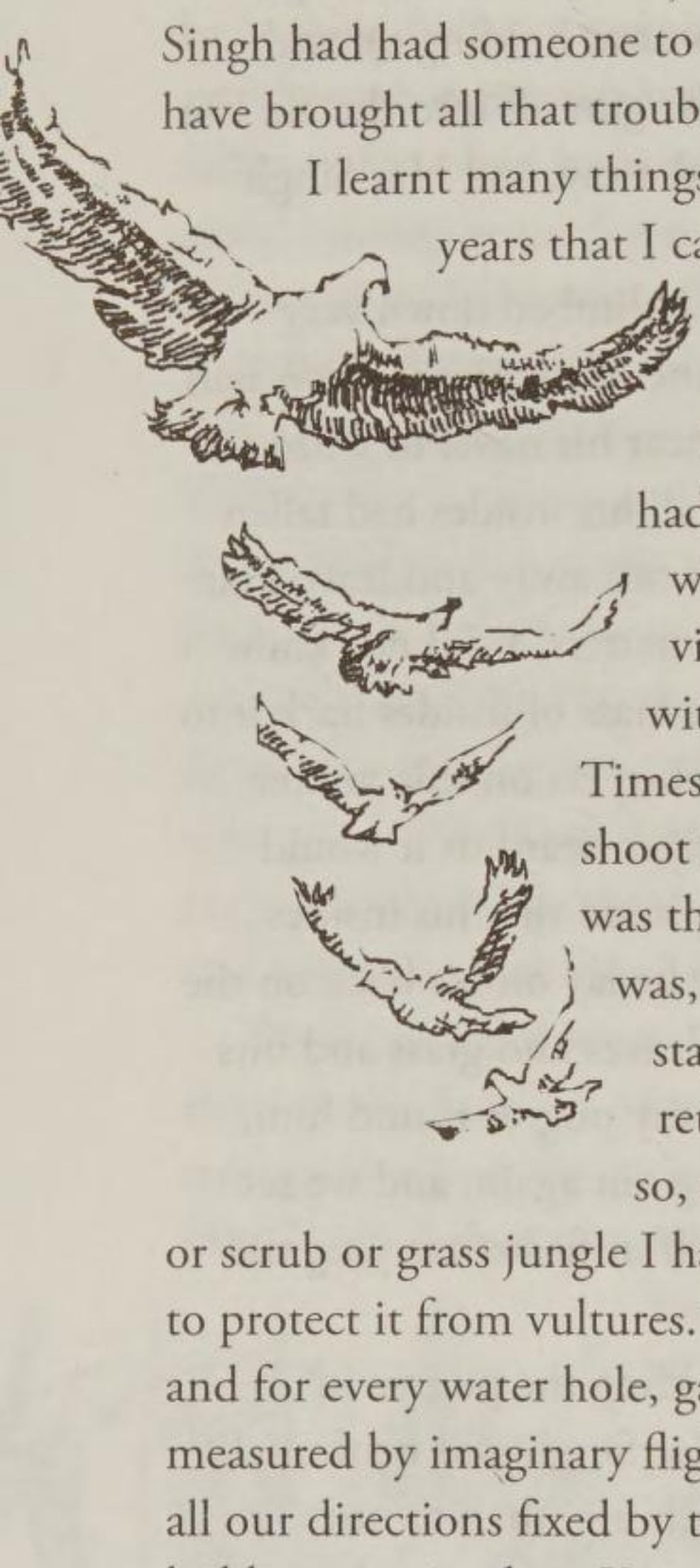


was so engaged, Har Singh was screaming and the tiger was roaring. I had taken my gun up into the tree with me, so now, holding on with my bare feet, I cocked the hammer and fired the gun off into the air. On hearing the shot so close to it the tiger bounded away, and Har Singh collapsed at the foot of the tree.

'When the tiger had been gone some time, I climbed down very silently, and went to Har Singh. I found that one of the tiger's claws had entered his stomach and torn the lining from near his navel to within a few fingers' breadth of the backbone, and that all his insides had fallen out. Here was great trouble for me. I could not run away and leave Har Singh, and not having any experience in these matters, I did not know whether it would be best to try and put all that mass of insides back into Har Singh's stomach, or cut it off. I talked in whispers on this matter with Har Singh, for we were afraid that if the tiger heard us it would return and kill us, and Har Singh was of the opinion that his insides should be put back into his stomach. So, while he lay on his back on the ground, I stuffed it all back, including the dry leaves and grass and bits of sticks that were sticking to it. I then wound my pugree round him, knotting it tight to keep everything from falling out again, and we set out on the seven-mile walk to our village, myself in front, carrying the two guns, while Har Singh walked behind.

'We had to go slowly, for Har Singh was holding the pugree in position, and on the way night came on and Har Singh said he thought it would be better to go to the hospital at Kaladhungi than to our village; so I hid the guns, and we went the extra three miles to the hospital. The hospital was closed when we arrived, but the doctor babu who lives near by was awake, and when he heard our story he sent me to call Aladia the tobacco seller, who is also postmaster at Kaladhungi and who receives five rupees pay per month from Government, while he lit a lantern and went to the hospital hut with Har Singh. When I returned with Aladia, the doctor had laid Har Singh on a string bed and, while Aladia held the lantern and I held the two pieces of flesh together, the doctor sewed up the hole in Har Singh's stomach. Thereafter the doctor, who is a very kind man of raw years and who refused to take the two rupees I offered him, gave Har Singh a drink of very good medicine to make him forget the pain in his stomach and we went home and found our womenfolk crying, for they thought we had been killed in the jungle by dacoits, or by wild animals. So you see, Sahib, how necessary it is for

us men who shoot in the jungles to know how to climb trees, for if Har Singh had had someone to advise him when he was a boy, he would not have brought all that trouble on us."[1]



I learnt many things from Kunwar Singh during the first few years that I carried the old muzzle-loader, one of the them being the making of mental maps. The jungles we hunted in, sometimes together, but more often alone—for Kunwar Singh had a horror of dacoits and there were times when for weeks on end he would not leave his village—were many hundreds of miles square with only one road running through them. Times without number when returning from a shoot I called in at Kunwar Singh's village, which was three miles nearer the forest than my house was, to tell him I had shot a *chital* or *sambhar* stag, or maybe a big pig, and to ask him to retrieve the bag. He never once failed to do so, no matter in how great a wilderness of tree or scrub or grass jungle I had carefully hidden the animal I had shot, to protect it from vultures. We had a name for every outstanding tree, and for every water hole, game track, and *nullah*. All our distances were measured by imaginary flight of a bullet fired from a muzzle-loader, and all our directions fixed by the four points of the compass. When I had hidden an animal, or Kunwar Singh had seen vultures collected on a tree and suspected that a leopard or a tiger had made a kill, either he or I would set out with absolute confidence that we would find the spot indicated, no matter what time of day or night it might be.

After I left school and started work in Bengal I was only able to visit Kaladhungi for about three weeks each year, and I was greatly distressed to find on one of these annual visits that my old friend Kunwar

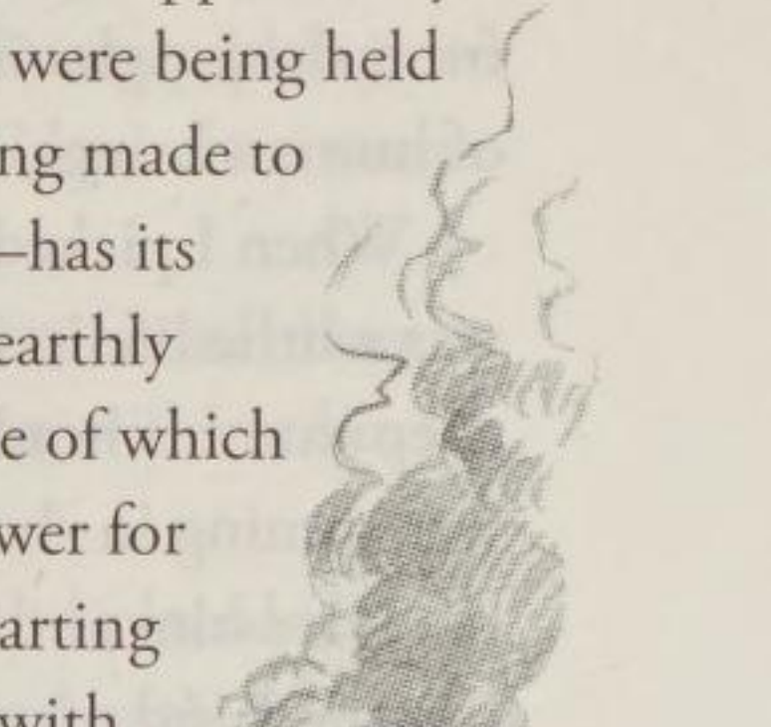
[1]The *runi* tree against which the tigress—who evidently had just given birth to cubs in that area, and who resented the presence of human beings—pinned Har Singh was about eighteen inches thick, and in her rage the tigress tore away a third of it. This tree became a landmark for all who shot or poached in the Garuppu jungles until, some twenty-five years later, it was destroyed by a forest fire.

Har Singh, in spite of the rough and ready treatment he received at the hands of his three friends, and in spite of the vegetation that went inside him, suffered no ill effects from his wound, and lived to die of old age.

Singh had fallen a victim to the curse of our foothills, opium. With a constitution weakened by malaria the pernicious habit grew on him, and though he made me many promises he had not the moral strength to keep them. I was therefore not surprised, on my visit to Kaladhungi one February, to be told by the men in our village that Kunwar Singh was very seriously ill. News of my arrival spread through Kaladhungi that night, and next day Kunwar Singh's youngest son, a lad of eighteen, came hot-foot to tell me that his father was at death's door, and that he wished to see me before he died.

As headman of Chandni Chauk, paying Government land revenue of four thousand rupees, Kunwar Singh was an important person, and lived in a big stone-built house with a slate roof in which I had often enjoyed his hospitality. Now as I approached the village in company with his son, I heard the wailing of women coming, not from the house, but from a small one-roomed hut Kunwar Singh had built for one of his servants. As the son led me towards this hut, he said his father had been moved to it because the grandchildren disturbed his sleep. Seeing us coming, Kunwar Singh's eldest son stepped out of the hut and informed me that his father was unconscious, and that he only had a few minutes to live.

I stopped at the door of the hut, and when my eyes had got accustomed to the dim light, made dimmer by a thick pall of smoke which filled the room, I saw Kunwar Singh lying on the bare mud floor, naked, and partly covered with a sheet. His nerveless right arm was supported by an old man sitting on the floor near him, and his fingers were being held round the tail of a cow. (This custom of a dying man being made to hold the tail of a cow—preferably that of a black heifer—has its origin in the Hindu belief that when the spirit leaves its earthly body it is confronted with a river of blood, on the far side of which sits the Judge before whom the spirit must appear to answer for its sins. The heifer's tail is the only way by which the departing spirit can cross the river, and if the spirit is not provided with means of transit it is condemned to remain on earth, to be a torment to those who failed to enable it to appear before the judgment seat.) Near Kunwar Singh's head was a brazier with cow-dung cakes burning on it, and by the brazier a priest was sitting, intoning prayers and ringing a bell. Every available inch of floor space was packed with

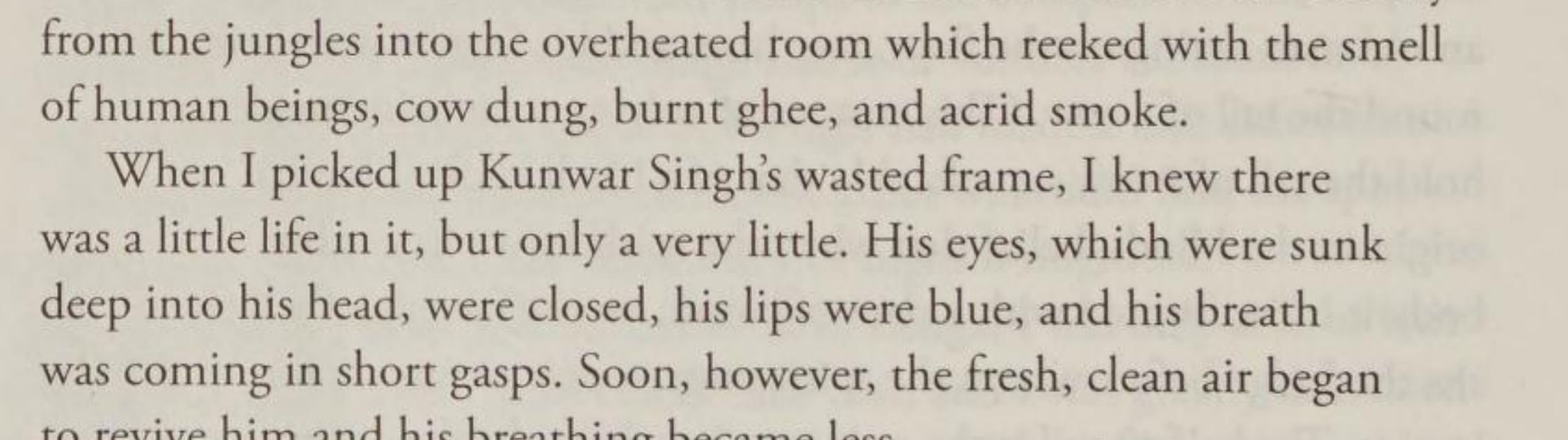


men, and with women who were wailing and repeating over and over again, 'He has gone! He has gone!'

I knew men died like this in India every day, but I was not going to let my friend be one of them. In fact, if I could help it he would not die at all, and anyway not at present. Striding into the room, I picked up the iron brazier, which was hotter than I expected it to be, and burnt my hands. This I carried to the door and flung outside. Returning, I cut the bark rope by which the cow was tethered to a peg driven into the mud floor, and led it outside. As these acts, which I had performed in silence, became evident to the people assembled in the room, the hubbub began to die down, and it ceased altogether when I took the priest's arm and conducted him from the room. Then, standing at the door, I ordered everyone to go outside, the order was obeyed without a murmur or a single protest. The number of people, both old and young, who emerged from the hut was incredible. When the last of them had crossed the doorstep, I told Kunwar Singh's eldest son to warm two seers of fresh milk and to bring it to me with as little delay as possible. The man looked at me in blank surprise, but when I repeated the order he hurried off to execute it.

I now re-entered the hut, pulled forward a string bed which had been pushed against the wall, picked Kunwar Singh up and laid him on it. Fresh air, and plenty of it, was urgently needed, and as I looked round I saw a small window which had been boarded up. It did not take long to tear down the boards and let a stream of clean sweet air blow directly from the jungles into the overheated room which reeked with the smell of human beings, cow dung, burnt ghee, and acrid smoke.

When I picked up Kunwar Singh's wasted frame, I knew there was a little life in it, but only a very little. His eyes, which were sunk deep into his head, were closed, his lips were blue, and his breath was coming in short gasps. Soon, however, the fresh, clean air began to revive him and his breathing became less laboured and more regular, and



presently, as I sat on his bed and watched through the door the commotion that was taking place among the mourners whom I had ejected from the death-chamber, I became aware that he had opened his eyes and was looking at me; and without turning my head, I began to speak.

'Times have changed, uncle, and you with them. There was a day when no man would have dared to remove you from your own house, and lay you on the ground in a servant's hut to die like an outcaste and a beggar. You would not listen to my words of warning and now the accursed drug has brought you to this. Had I delayed but a few minutes in answering your summons this day, you know you would by now have been on your way to the burning-ghat. As headman of Chandni Chauk and the best *shikari* in Kaladhungi, all men respected you. But now you have lost that respect, and you who were strong, and who ate of the best, are weak and empty of stomach, for as we came your son told me nothing has passed your lips for sixteen days. But you are not going to die, old friend, as they told you you were. You will live for many more years, and though we may never shoot together again in the Garuppu jungles, you will not want for game, for I will share all I shoot with you, as I have always done.

'And now, here in this hut, with the sacred thread round your fingers and a pipal leaf in your hands, you must swear an oath on your eldest son's head that never again will you touch the foul drug. And this time you will, and you shall keep your oath. And now, while we wait for the milk your son is bringing, we will smoke.'

Kunwar Singh had not taken his eyes off me while I was speaking, and now for the first time he opened his lips and said, 'How can a man who is dying smoke?'

'On the subject of dying', I said, 'we will say no more, for as I have just told you, you are not going to die. And as to how we will smoke, I will show you.'

Then, taking two cigarettes from my case, I lit one and placed it between his lips. Slowly he took a pull at it, coughed, and with a very feeble hand removed the cigarette. But when the fit of coughing was over, he replaced it between his lips and continued to draw on it. Before we had finished our smoke, Kunwar Singh's son returned carrying a big brass vessel, which he would have dropped at the door if I had not hurriedly relieved him of it. His surprise was understandable, for the father whom he had last seen lying on the ground dying, was now lying

on the bed, his head resting on my hat, smoking. There was nothing in the hut to drink from, so I sent the son back to the house for a cup; and when he had brought it I gave Kunwar Singh a drink of warm milk.

I stayed in the hut till late into the night, and when I left Kunwar Singh had drunk a seer of milk and was sleeping peacefully on a warm and comfortable bed. Before I left I warned the son that he was on no account to allow anyone to come near the hut; that he was to sit by his father and give him a drink of milk every time he awoke; and that if on my return in the morning I found Kunwar Singh dead, I would burn down the village.

The sun was just rising next morning when I returned to Chandni Chauk to find both Kunwar Singh and his son fast asleep and the brass vessel empty.

Kunwar Singh kept his oath, and though he never regained sufficient strength to accompany me on my *shikar* expeditions, he visited me often and died peacefully four years later in his own house and on his own bed.

Mothi

Mothi had the delicate, finely chiselled features that are the heritage of all high-caste people in India, but he was only a young stripling, all arms and legs, when his father and mother died and left him with the responsibilities of the family. Fortunately it was a small one, consisting only of his younger brother and sister.

Mothi was at that time fourteen years of age, and had been married for six years. One of his first acts on finding himself unexpectedly the head of the family was to fetch his twelve-year-old wife—whom he had not seen since the day of their wedding—from her father's house in the Kota Dun, some dozen miles from Kaladhungi.

As the cultivation of the six acres of land Mothi inherited entailed more work than the four young people could tackle, Mothi took on a partner, locally known as a *sagee*, who in return for his day-and-night services received free board and lodging and half of the crops produced.

The building of the communal hut with bamboos and grass procured from the jungles, under permit, and carried long distances on shoulder and on head, and the constant repairs to the hut necessitated by the violent storms that sweep the foothills, threw a heavy burden on Mothi and his helpers, and to relieve them of this burden I built them a masonry house, with three rooms and a wide veranda, on a four-foot plinth. For, with the exception of Mothi's wife who had come from a higher altitude, all of them were steeped in malaria.

To protect their crops the tenants used to erect a thorn fence round the entire village, but though it entailed weeks of hard labour, this flimsy fence afforded little protection against stray cattle and wild animals, and when the crops were on the ground the tenants, or members of their families, had to keep watch in the fields all night. Firearms were strictly rationed, and for our forty tenants the Government allowed us one single-barrelled muzzle-loading gun. This gun enables one tenant in turn to protect his crops with a lethal weapon, while the others had to rely on tin cans which they beat throughout the night. Though the gun accounted for a certain number of pigs and porcupines, which were the worst offenders, the nightly damage was considerable, for the village was isolated and surrounded by forests. So, when my handling contract at Mokameh Ghat began paying a dividend, I started building a masonry wall round the village. When completed, the wall was six feet high and three miles long. It took ten years to build, for my share of the dividends was small. If today you motor from Haldwani to Ramnagar, through Kaladhungi, you will skirt the upper end of the wall before you cross the Boar Bridge and enter the forest.

I was walking through the village one cold December morning, with Robin, my dog, running ahead and putting up covey after covey of grey partridge which no one but Robin ever disturbed—for all who lived in the village loved to hear them calling at sunrise and at sunset—when in the soft ground at the edge of one of the irrigation channels I saw the tracks of a pig. This pig, with great, curved, wicked-looking tusks, was as big as a buffalo calf and was known to everyone in the village. As a squeaker he had wormed his way through the thorn fence

and fattened on the crops. The wall had worried him at first, but it had a rough face and, being a determined pig, he had in time learnt to climb it. Time and time again the watchers in the fields had fired at him and on several occasions he had left a blood trail, but none of his wounds had proved fatal and the only effect they had had on him was to make him more wary.

On this December morning the pig's tracks led me towards Mothi's holding, and as I approached the house I saw Mothi's wife standing in front of it, her hands on her hips, surveying the ruin of their potato patch.

The pig had done a very thorough job, for the tubers were not mature and he had been hungry, and while Robin cast round to see in which direction the marauder had gone the woman gave vent to her feelings. 'It is all Punwa's father's fault', she said. 'It was his turn for the gun last night, and instead of staying at home and looking after his own property he must needs go and sit up in Kalu's wheat field because he thought there was a chance of shooting a *sambhar* there. And while he was away, this is what the shaitan has done.' No woman in our part of India ever refers to her husband, or addresses him, by name. Before children are born he is referred to as the man of the house, and after children come is spoken of and addressed as the father of the firstborn. Mothi now had three children, of whom the eldest was Punwa, so to his wife he was 'Punwa's father', and his wife to everyone in the village was 'Punwa's mother'.

Punwa's mother was not only the hardest-working woman in our village but she also had the sharpest tongue, and after telling me in no uncertain terms what she thought of Punwa's father for having absented himself the previous night, she turned on me and said I had wasted my money in building a wall over which a pig could climb to eat her potatoes, and that if I could not shoot the pig myself it was my duty to raise the wall a few feet so that no pig could climb over it. Mothi fortunately arrived while the storm was still breaking over my head, so whistling to Robin I beat a hasty retreat and left him to weather it.

That evening I picked up the tracks of the pig on the far side of the wall and followed them for two miles, at times along game paths and at times along the bank of the Boar river, until they led me to a dense patch of thorn bushes interlaced with *lantana*. At the edge of this cover I took

up position, as there was a fifty-fifty chance of the pig leaving the cover while there was still sufficient light for me to shoot by.

Shortly after I had taken up position behind a rock on the bank of the river, a *sambhar* hind started belling at the upper end of the jungle in which a few years later I was to shoot the Bachelor of Powalgarh.[1] The hind was warning the jungle folk of the presence of a tiger. A fortnight previously a party of three guns, with eight elephants, had arrived in Kaladhungi with the express purpose of shooting a tiger which, at that time, had his headquarters in the forest block for which I had a shooting pass. The Boar river formed the boundary between my block and the block taken by the party of three guns, and they had enticed the tiger to kill in their block by tying up fourteen young buffaloes on their side of the river. Two of these buffaloes had been killed by the tiger, the other twelve had died of neglect, and at about nine o'clock the previous night I had heard the report of a heavy rifle.

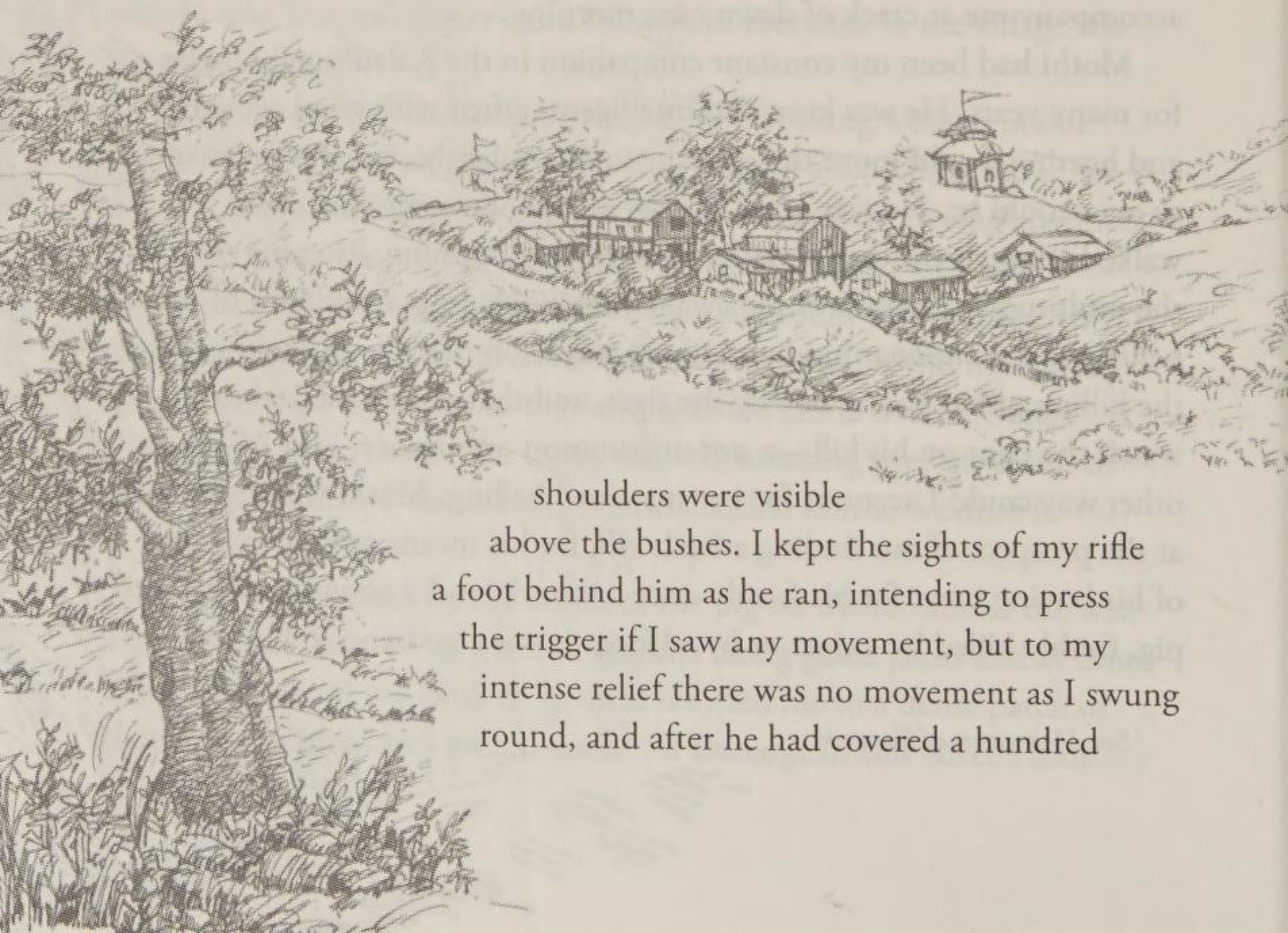
I sat behind the rock for two hours, listening to the belling *sambhar* but without seeing anything of the pig, and when there was no longer any light to shoot by I crossed the river and, gaining the Kota road, loped down it, easing up and moving cautiously when passing the caves in which a big python lived, and where Bill Bailey of the Forest Department a month previously had shot a twelve-foot hamadryad. At the village gate I stopped and shouted to Mothi to be ready to accompany me at crack of dawn next morning.

Mothi had been my constant companion in the Kaladhungi jungles for many years. He was keen and intelligent, gifted with good eyesight and hearing, could move through the jungles silently, and was as brave as man could be. He was never late for an appointment, and as we walked through the dew-drenched jungle that morning, listening to the multitude of sounds of the awakening jungle folk, I told him of the belling of the *sambhar* hind and of my suspicion that she had witnessed the killing of her young one by the tiger, and that she had stayed to watch the tiger on his kill—a not uncommon occurrence—for in no other way could I account for her sustained belling. Mothi was delighted at the prospect of our finding a fresh kill, for his means only permitted of his buying meat for his family once a month, and a *sambhar*, *chital*, or pig, freshly killed by a tiger or by a leopard, was a godsend to him.

[1] See *Man-eaters of Kumaon*.

I had located the belling *sambhar* as being due north and some fifteen hundred yards from me the previous evening, and when we arrived at this spot and found no kill we started looking on the ground for blood, hair, or a drag mark that would lead us to the kill; for I was still convinced that there was a kill to be found and that the killer was a tiger. At this spot two shallow depressions, coming down from the foot of the hill a few hundred yards away, met. The depressions ran more or less parallel to each other at a distance of about thirty yards and Mothi suggested that he should go up the right-hand depression while I went up the other. As there were only low bushes between, and we should be close to, and within sight of, each other, I agreed to the suggestion.

We had proceeded a hundred yards examining every foot of the ground, and going dead slow, when Mothi, just as I turned my head to look at him started backwards, screaming as he did so. Then he whipped round and ran for dear life, beating the air with his hands as if warding off a swarm of bees and continuing to scream as he ran. The sudden and piercing scream of a human being in a jungle where a moment before all has been silent is terrifying to hear, and quite impossible to describe. Instinctively I knew what had happened. With his eyes fixed on the ground, looking for blood or hair, Mothi had failed to see where he was going, and had walked on to the tiger. Whether he had been badly mauled or not I could not see, for only his head and



shoulders were visible above the bushes. I kept the sights of my rifle a foot behind him as he ran, intending to press the trigger if I saw any movement, but to my intense relief there was no movement as I swung round, and after he had covered a hundred

yards I considered he was safe. I yelled to him to stop, adding that I was coming to him. Then, backing away for a few yards, for I did not know whether the tiger had changed his position I hurried down the depression towards Mothi. He was standing with his back against a tree and I was greatly relieved to see that there was no blood on him or on the ground on which he was standing. As I reached him he asked what had happened, and when I told him that nothing had happened he expressed great surprise. He asked if the tiger had not sprung at him, or followed him; and when I replied that he had done everything possible to make the tiger do so, he said, 'I know, Sahib. I know I should not have screamed and run, but I—could—not—help—' As his voice tailed away and his head came forward I caught him by the throat, but he slipped through my hands and slumped to the ground. Every drop of blood had drained from his face, and as he lay minute after long minute without any movement, I feared the shock had killed him.

There is little one can do in the jungles in an emergency of this kind, and that little I did. I stretched Mothi on his back, loosened his clothes, and massaged the region of his heart. Just as I was giving up hope and preparing to carry him home, he opened his eyes.

When Mothi was comfortably seated on the ground with his back to the tree and a half-smoked cigarette between his lips I asked him to tell me exactly what had happened. 'I had gone a short distance up the depression after I left you', he said, 'closely examining the ground for traces of blood or hair, when I saw what looked like a spot of dry blood on a leaf. So I stooped down to have a closer look and, as I raised my head, I looked straight into the face of the tiger. The tiger was lying crouched down facing me at a distance of three or four paces. His head was a little raised off the ground; his mouth was wide open, and there was blood on his chin and on his chest. He looked as though he was on the point of springing at me, so I lost my head and screamed and ran away.' He had seen nothing of the *sambhar* kill. He said the ground was open and free of bushes and there was no kill where the tiger was lying.

Telling Mothi to stay where he was I stubbed out my cigarette and set off to investigate, for I could think of no reason why a tiger with its mouth open, and blood on its chin and on its chest, should allow Mothi to approach within a few feet, over open ground, and not kill him when he screamed in its face. Going with the utmost caution to the spot where Mothi was standing when he screamed, I saw in front of me a bare patch

of ground from which the tiger had swept the carpet of dead leaves as he had rolled from side to side; at the nearer edge of this bare patch of ground there was a semicircle of clotted blood. Skirting round where the tiger had been lying, to avoid disturbing the ground, I picked up on the far side of it a light and fresh blood trail, which for no apparent reason zigzagged towards the hill, and then continued along the foot of the hill for a few hundred yards and entered a deep and narrow ravine in which there was a little stream. Up this ravine, which ran deep into the foothills, the tiger had gone. I made my way back to the bare patch of ground and examined the clotted blood. There were splinters of bone and teeth in it, and these splinters provided me with the explanation I was looking for. The rifle-shot I had heard two nights previously had shattered the tiger's lower jaw, and he had made for the jungle in which he had his home. He had gone as far as his sufferings and loss of blood permitted and had then lain down on the spot where first the *sambhar* had seen him tossing about, and where thirty hours later Mothi walked on to him. The most painful wound that can be inflicted on an animal, the shattering of the lower jaw, had quite evidently induced high fever and the poor beast had perhaps only been semi-conscious when he heard Mothi screaming in his face. He had got up quietly and staggered away, in a last effort to reach the ravine in which he knew there was water.

up the blood trail and the elephant tracks, and followed them for five or six hundred yards to where the blood trail led into heavy cover. At the edge of the cover the elephants had halted and, after standing about for some time, had turned to the right and gone away in the direction of Kaladhungi. I had met the returning elephants as I was starting out the previous evening to try and get a shot at the old pig, and one of the guns had asked me where I was going, and when I told him, had appeared to want to tell me something but was restrained from doing so by his companions. So, while the party of three guns went off on their elephants to the Forest Bungalow where they were staying, I had gone off on foot, without any warning, into the jungle in which they had left a wounded tiger.

The walk back to the village from where I had left Mothi was only about three miles, but it took us about as many hours to cover the distance, for Mothi was unaccountably weak and had to rest frequently. After leaving him at his house I went straight to the Forest Bungalow, where I found the party of three packed up and on the point of leaving to catch the evening train at Haldwani. We talked on the steps of the veranda for some little time, I doing most of the talking, and when I learnt that the only reason they could not spare the time to recover the tiger they had wounded was the keeping of a social engagement, I told them that if Mothi died as a result of shock or if the tiger killed any of my tenants, they would have to face a charge of manslaughter.

The party left after my talk with them, and next morning, armed with a heavy rifle, I entered the ravine up which the tiger had gone, not with the object of recovering a trophy for others, but with the object of putting the tiger out of his misery and burning his skin. The ravine, every foot of which I knew, was the last place I would have selected in which to look for a wounded tiger. However, I searched it from top to bottom, and also the hills on either side, for the whole of that day without finding any trace of the tiger, for the blood trail had stopped shortly after he entered the ravine.

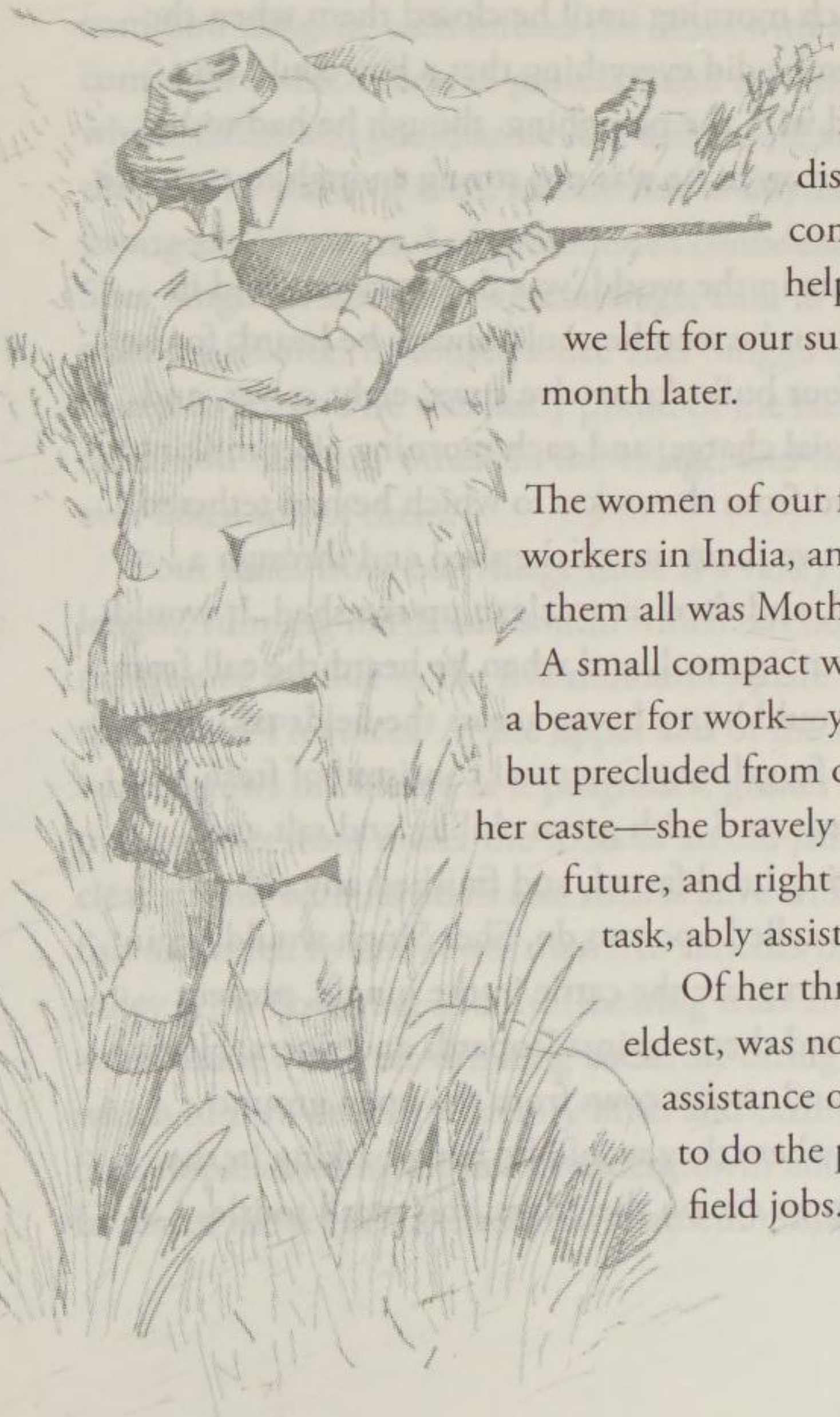
Ten days later a forest guard on his rounds came on the remains of a tiger that had been eaten by vultures. In the summer of that year Government made a rule prohibiting sitting up for tigers between the hours of sunset and sunrise, and making it incumbent on sportsmen wounding tigers to make every effort to bring the wounded animal to

bag, and to make an immediate report of the occurrence to the nearest Forest Officer and police outpost.

Mothi met with his experience in December, and when we left Kaladhungi in April he appeared to be little the worse for the shock. But his luck was out, for a month later he was badly mauled by a leopard he wounded one night in his field and followed next morning into heavy cover; and he had hardly recovered from his wounds when he had the misfortune of being responsible for the death of a cow—the greatest crime a Hindu can commit. The cow, an old and decrepit animal that had strayed in from an adjoining village, was grazing in Mothi's field, and as he attempted to drive it out it put its hoof in a deep rat-hole and broke its leg. For weeks Mothi attended assiduously to the cow as it lay in his field, but it died eventually, and the matter being too serious for the village priest to deal with, he ordered Mothi to make a pilgrimage to Hardwar. So, having borrowed money for the journey, to Hardwar Mothi went. Here to the head priest at the main temple Mothi confessed his crime, and after that dignitary had given the offence due consideration he ordered Mothi to make a donation to the temple: this would absolve him of his crime, but in order to show repentance he would have also to do penance. The priest then asked him from what acts he derived most pleasure and Mothi, being without guile, made answer that he derived most pleasure from shooting, and from eating meat. Mothi was then told by the priest that in future he must refrain from these two pleasures.

Mothi returned from his pilgrimage cleared of his crime, but burdened with a lifelong penance. His opportunities for shooting had been few, for besides having to share the muzzle-loading gun with others he had had to confine his shooting to the village boundaries, as no man in his position was permitted to shoot in Government forests; even so, Mothi had derived great pleasure from the old gun, and from the occasional shots I had permitted him—against all rules—to fire from my rifle. Hard as this half of his penance was the second half was even harder, and, moreover, it adversely affected his health. Though his means had only allowed him to buy a small meat ration once a month, pigs and porcupines were plentiful, and deer occasionally strayed into the fields at night. It was the custom in our village, a custom to which I also adhered, for an animal shot by one to be shared by all, so Mothi had not had to depend entirely on the meat he could buy.

It was during the winter following his pilgrimage to Hardwar that Mothi developed a hacking cough. As the remedies we tried failed to give relief, I got a doctor friend who was passing through Kaladhungi to examine him, and was horrified to learn that he was suffering from tuberculosis. On the doctor's recommendation I sent Mothi to the Bhowali Sanatorium, thirty miles away. Five days later he returned with a letter from the Superintendent of the Sanatorium saying that the case was hopeless, and that for this reason the Superintendent regretted he could not admit Mothi. A medical missionary who was staying with us at the time, and who had worked for years in a sanatorium, advised us to make Mothi sleep in the open and drink a quart of milk with a few drops of paraffin in it each morning. So for the rest of that winter Mothi slept in the open, and while sitting on our veranda, smoking a cigarette and talking to me, each morning drank a quart of milk fresh from our cows.



The poor of India are fatalists, and in addition have little stamina to fight disease. Deprived of our company, though not of our help, Mothi lost hope when we left for our summer home, and died a month later.

The women of our foothills are the hardest workers in India, and the hardest working of them all was Mothi's widow, Punwa's mother. A small compact woman, as hard as flint and a beaver for work—young enough to remarry but precluded from doing so by reasons of her caste—she bravely and resolutely faced the future, and right gallantly she fulfilled her task, ably assisted by her young children.

Of her three children, Punwa, the eldest, was now twelve, and with the assistance of neighbours was able to do the ploughing and other field jobs. Kunthi, a girl, was ten

and married, and until she left the village five years later to join her husband she assisted her mother in all her thousand and one tasks, which included cooking the food and washing up the dishes; washing and mending the clothes—for Punwa's mother was very particular about her own and her children's dress, and no matter how old and patched the garments were, they always had to be clean; fetching water from the irrigation furrow or from the Boar river for domestic purposes; bringing firewood from the jungles, and grass and tender young leaves for the milch cows and their calves; weeding and cutting the crops; husking the paddy, in a hole cut in a slab of rock, with an ironshod staff that was heavy enough to tire the muscles of any man; winnowing the wheat for Punwa to take to the watermill to be ground into *atta*; and making frequent visits to the bazaar two miles away to drive hard bargains for the few articles of food and clothing the family could afford to buy. Sher Singh, the youngest child, was eight, and from the moment he opened his eyes at crack of dawn each morning until he closed them when the evening meal had been eaten he did everything that a boy could do. He even gave Punwa a hand with the ploughing, though he had to be helped at the end of each furrow as he was not strong enough to turn the plough.

Sher Singh, without a care in the world, was the happiest child in the village. When he could not be seen he could always be heard, for he loved to sing. The cattle—four bullocks, twelve cows, eight calves, and Lalu the bull—were his special charge, and each morning after milking the cows he released the herd from the stakes to which he had tethered them the evening before, drove them out of the shed and through a wicket in the boundary wall, and then set to clean up the shed. It would now be the time for the morning meal, and when he heard the call from his mother, or Kunthi, he would hurry home across the fields taking the milk can with him. The frugal morning meal consisted of fresh hot *chapattis* and *dal*, liberally seasoned with green chillies and salt and cooked in mustard oil. Having breakfasted, and finished any chores about the house that he was called upon to do, Sher Singh would begin his day's real work. This was to graze the cattle in the jungle, prevent them from straying, and guard them against leopards and tigers. Having collected the four bullocks and twelve cows from the open ground beyond the boundary wall, where they would be lying basking in the sun, and left Kunthi to keep an eye on the calves, this small tousle-

headed boy, his axe over his shoulder and Lalu the bull following him, would drive his charges over the Boar Bridge and into the dense jungle beyond, calling to each by name.

Lalu was a young scrub bull destined to be a plough-bullock when he had run his course but who, at the time I am writing about, was free of foot and the pride of Sher Singh his foster-brother, for Lalu had shared his mother's milk with Sher Singh. Sher Singh had christened his foster-brother *Lalu*, which means red. But Lalu was not red. He was of a light dun colour, with stronger markings on the shoulders and a dark, almost black line running down the length of his back. His horns were short, sharp, and strong, with the light and dark colourings associated with the shoehorns that adorned dressing tables of that period.

When human beings and animals live in close association with each other under conditions in which they are daily subjected to common dangers, each infuses the other with a measure of courage and confidence which the one possesses and the other lacks. Sher Singh, whose father and grandfather had been more at home in the jungles than in the walks of men, had no fear of anything that walked, and Lalu, young and vigorous, had unbounded confidence in himself. So while Sher Singh infused Lalu with courage, Lalu in turn infused Sher Singh with confidence. In consequence Sher Singh's cattle grazed where others feared to go, and he was justly proud of the fact that they were in better condition than any others in the village, and that no leopard or tiger had ever taken toll of them.

Four miles from our village there is a valley about five miles in length, running north and south, which has no equal in beauty or richness of wildlife in the five thousand square miles of forest land in the United Provinces. At the upper end of the valley a clear stream, which grows in volume as it progresses, gushes from a cave in which a python lives from under the roots of an old jamun tree. This crystal-clear stream with its pools and runs is alive with many kinds of small fish on which live no fewer than five varieties of kingfishers. In the valley grow flowering and fruit-bearing trees and bushes that attract a multitude of nectar-drinking and fruit-eating birds and animals, which in turn attract predatory birds and carnivorous animals which find ample cover in the dense undergrowth and matted cane-brakes. In places the set of the stream has caused miniature landslides, and on

these grows a reedy kind of grass, with broad lush leaves, much fancied by *sambhar* and *kakar*.

The valley was a favourite haunt of mine. One winter evening, shortly after our descent to Kaladhungi from our summer home, I was standing at a point where there is a clear view into the valley when, in a clump of grass to the left, I saw a movement. After a long scrutiny the movement revealed itself as an animal feeding on the lush grass on a steep slope. The animal was too light for a *sambhar* and too big for a *kakar*, so I set out to stalk it, and as I did so a tiger started calling in the valley a few hundred yards lower down. My quarry also heard the tiger, and as it raised its head I saw to my surprise that it was Lalu. With head poised he stood perfectly still listening to the tiger, and when it stopped calling he unconcernedly resumed cropping the grass. This was forbidden ground for Lalu, for cattle are not permitted to graze in Government Reserved Forests, and moreover Lalu was in danger from the tiger; so I called to him by name and, after a little hesitation, he came up the steep bank and we returned to the village together. Sher Singh was tying up his cattle in the shed when we arrived, and when I told him where I had found Lalu he laughed and said, 'Don't fear for this one, Sahib. The forest guard is a friend of mine and would not impound my Lalu, and as for the tiger, Lalu is well able to take care of himself.'

Not long after this incident, the chief Conservator of Forests, Smythies, and his wife arrived on tour in Kaladhungi, and as the camels carrying their camp equipment were coming down the forest road towards the Boar Bridge, a tiger killed a cow on the road in front of them. On the approach of the camels, and the shouting of the men with them, the tiger left the cow on the road and bounded into the jungle. The Smythies were sitting on our veranda having morning coffee when the camel men brought word of the killing of the cow. Mrs Smythies was keen to shoot the tiger, so I went off with two of her men to put up a *machan* for her, and found that in the meantime the tiger had returned and dragged the cow twenty yards into the jungle. When the *machan* was ready I sent back for Mrs Smythies and, after putting her into the *machan* with a forest guard to keep her company, I climbed a tree on the edge of the road hoping to get a photograph of the tiger.

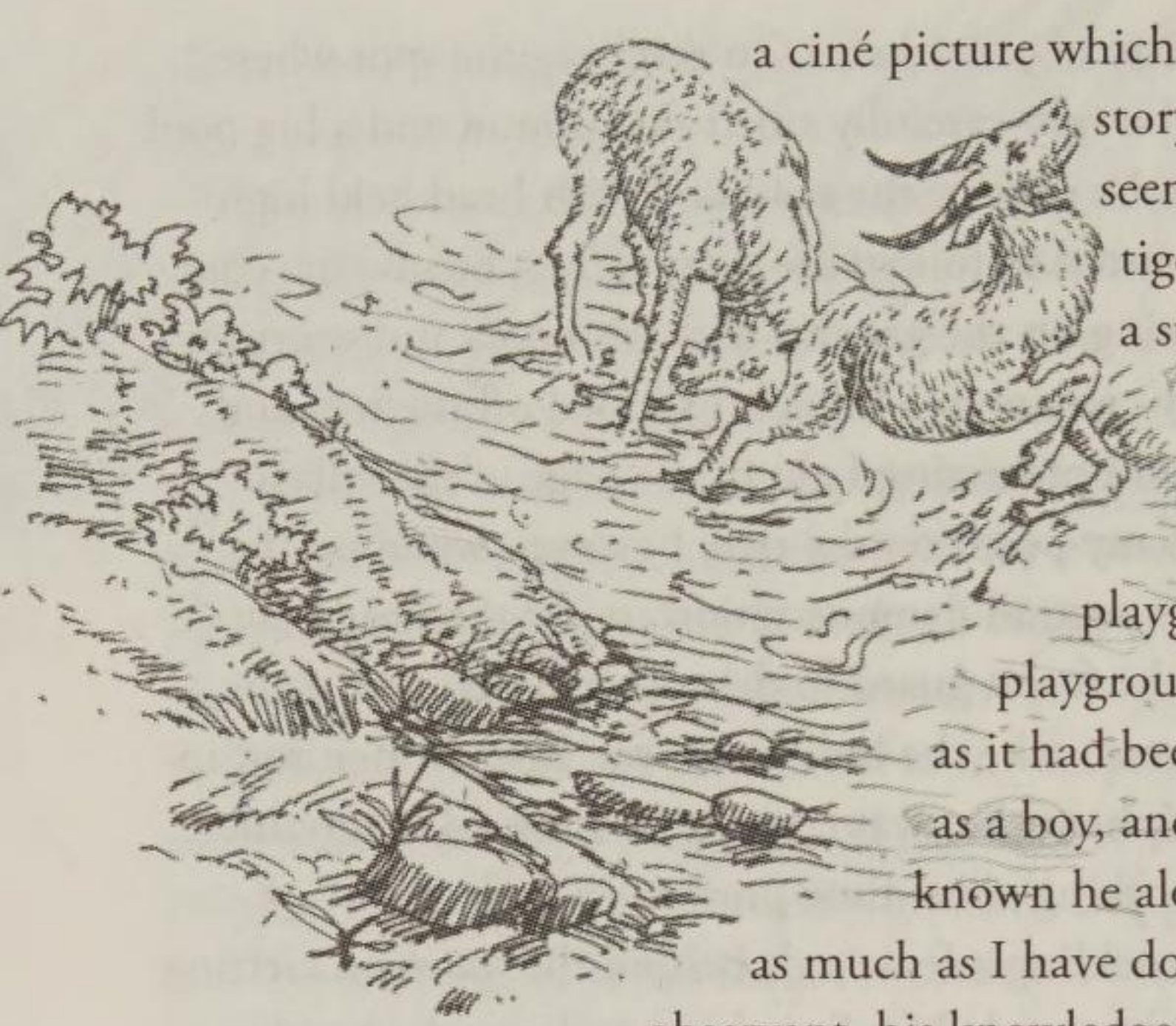
It was 4 p.m. We had been in position half an hour, and a *kakar* had just started barking in the direction in which we knew the tiger was

lying up, when down the road came Lalu. On reaching the spot where the cow had been killed he very carefully smelt the ground and a big pool of blood, then turned to the edge of the road and with head held high and nose stretched out started to follow the drag. When he saw the cow he circled round her, tearing up the ground with his hoofs and snorting with rage. After tying my camera to a branch I slipped off the tree and conducted a very angry and protesting Lalu to the edge of the village. Hardly had I returned to my perch on the tree, however, when up the road came Lalu to make a second demonstration round the dead cow. Mrs Smythies now sent the forest guard to drive Lalu away, and as the man passed me I told him to take the bull across the Boar Bridge and to remain there with the elephant that was coming later for Mrs Smythies. The *kakar* had stopped barking some time previously and a covey of jungle fowl now started cackling a few yards behind the *machan*. Getting my camera ready I looked towards Mrs Smythies, and saw she had her rifle poised, and at that moment Lalu appeared for the third time. (We learnt later that, after being taken across the bridge, he had circled round, crossed the river bed lower down and disappeared into the jungle.) This time Lalu trotted up to the cow and, either seeing or smelling the tiger, lowered his head and charged into the bushes, bellowing loudly. Three times he did this, and after each charge he retreated backwards to his starting-point, slashing upwards with his horns as he did so.

I have seen buffaloes driving tigers away from their kills, and I have seen cattle doing the same with leopards but, with the exception of Himalayan bear, I had never before seen a solitary animal—and a scrub bull at that—drive a tiger away from his kill.

Courageous as Lalu was he was no match for the tiger, who was losing his temper and answering Lalu's bellows with angry growls. Remembering a small boy back in the village whose heart would break if anything happened to his beloved companion, I was on the point of going to Lalu's help when Mrs Smythies very sportingly gave up her chance of shooting the tiger, so I shouted to the mahout to bring up the elephant. Lalu was very subdued as he followed me to the shed where Sher Singh was waiting to tie him up, and I think he was as relieved as I was that the tiger had not accepted his challenge while he was defending the dead cow.

The tiger fed on the cow that night and next evening, and while Mrs Smythies was having another unsuccessful try to get a shot at him, I took



a ciné picture which some who read this story may remember having seen. In the picture the tiger is seen coming down a steep bank, and drinking at a little pool.

The jungle was Sher Singh's playground, the only playground he ever knew, just as it had been my playground as a boy, and of all whom I have known he alone enjoyed the jungles as much as I have done. Intelligent and observant, his knowledge of jungle lore was incredible. Nothing escaped his attention, and he was as fearless as the animal whose name he bore.

Our favourite evening walk was along one of the three roads which met on the far side of the Boar Bridge—the abandoned trunk road to Moradabad, the road to Kota, and the forest road to Ramnagar. Most evenings at sundown we would hear Sher Singh before we saw him, for he sang with abandon in a clear treble voice that carried far as he drove his cattle home. Always he would greet us with a smile and a *salaam*, and always he would have something interesting to tell us. 'The big tiger's tracks were on the road this morning coming from the direction of Kota and going towards Naya Gaon, and at midday I heard him calling at the lower end of the Dhunigad cane-brake'. 'Near Saryapani I heard the clattering of horns, so I climbed a tree and saw two *chital* stags fighting. One of them has very big horns, Sahib, and is very fat, and I have eaten no meat for many days.' 'What am I carrying?'—he had something wrapped in big green leaves and tied round with bark balanced on his tousled head. 'I am carrying a pig's leg. I saw some vultures on a tree, so I went to have a look and under a bush I found a pig killed by a leopard last night and partly eaten. If you want to shoot the leopard, Sahib, I will take you to the kill.' 'Today I found a beehive in a hollow *haldu* tree', he said one day, proudly exhibiting a large platter of leaves held together with long thorns on which the snow-white comb was resting. 'I have brought the honey for you.' Then, glancing at the rifle in

my hands, he added, 'I will bring the honey to the house when I have finished my work for perchance you may meet a pig or a *kakar* and with the honey in your hands you would not be able to shoot.' The cutting of the hive out of the *haldu* tree with his small axe had probably taken him two hours or more, and he had got badly stung in the process, for his hands were swollen and one eye was nearly closed, but he said nothing about this and to have commented on it would have embarrassed him. Later that night, while we were having dinner, he slipped silently into the room and as he laid the brass tray, polished till it looked like gold, on our table, he touched the elbow of his right arm with the fingers of his left hand, an old hill custom denoting respect, which is fast dying out.

After depositing such a gift on the table, leaving the tray for Kunthi to call for in the morning, Sher Singh would pause at the door and, looking down and scratching the carpet with his toes, would say, 'If you are going bird shooting tomorrow I will send Kunthi out with the cattle and come with you, for I know where there are a lot of birds'. He was always shy in a house, and on these occasions spoke with a catch in his voice as though he had too many words in his mouth and was trying, with difficulty, to swallow the ones that were getting in his way.

Sher Singh was in his element on these bird shoots, which the boys of the village enjoyed as much as he and I did, for in addition to the excitement and the prospect of having a bird to take home at the end of the day, there was always a halt at midday at a prearranged spot to which the man sent out earlier would provide a meal for all.

When I had taken my position, Sher Singh would line up his companions and bear the selected cover towards me, shouting the loudest of them all and worming his way through the thickest cover. When a bird was put up he would yell, 'It's coming, Sahib! It's coming!' Or when a heavy animal went crashing through the undergrowth, as very frequently happened, he would call to his

companions not to run away, assuring them that it was only a *sambhar*, or a *chital*, or maybe a sounder of pig. Ten to twelve patches of cover would be beaten in the course of the day, yielding as many pea fowl and jungle fowl, and two or three hares and possibly a small pig or a porcupine. At the end of the last beat the bag would be shared out among the beaters and the gun, or if the bag was small only among the beaters, and Sher Singh was never more happy than when, at the end of the day, he made for home with a peacock in full plumage proudly draped over his shoulders.

Punwa was now married, and the day was fast approaching when Sher Singh would have to leave the home, for there was not sufficient room on the small holding of six acres for the two brothers. Knowing that it would break Sher Singh's heart to leave the village and his beloved jungles, I decided to apprentice him to a friend who had a garage at Kathgodam, and who ran a fleet of cars on the Naini Tal motor road. After his training it was my intention to employ Sher Singh to drive our car and accompany me on my shooting trips during the winter, and to look after our cottage and garden at Kaladhungi while we were in Naini Tal during the summer. Sher Singh was speechless with delight when I told him of the plans I had made for him, plans which ensured his continued residence in the village, and within sight and calling distance of the home he had never left from the day of his birth.

Plans a-many we make in life, and I am not sure there is cause for regret when some go wrong. Sher Singh was to have started his apprenticeship when we returned to Kaladhungi in November. In October he contracted malignant malaria which led to pneumonia, and a few days before we arrived he died. During his boyhood's years he had sung through life happy as the day was long and, had he lived, who can say that his life in a changing world would have been as happy, and as carefree, as those first few years?

Before leaving our home for a spell, to regain in new climes the health we lost in Hitler's war, I called together our tenants and their families as I had done on two previous occasions, to tell them the time had come for them to take over their holdings and run the village for themselves. Punwa's mother was the spokesman for the tenants on this occasion, and after I had had my say she got to her feet and, in her practical way, spoke as follows: 'You have called us away from our work to no

purpose. We have told you before and we tell you again that we will not take your land from you, for to do so would imply that we were no longer your people. And now, Sahib, what about the pig, the son of the shaitan who climbed your wall and ate my potatoes? Punwa and these others cannot shoot it and I am tired of sitting up all night and beating a tin can.'

Maggie and I were walking along the fire-track that skirts the foothills with David at our heels when the pig—worthy son of the old *shaitan* who, full of years and pellets of buckshot, had been killed in an all-night fight with a tiger—trotted across the track. The sun had set and the range was long—all of three hundred yards—but a shot was justifiable for the pig was quite evidently on his way to the village. I adjusted the sights and, resting the rifle against a tree, waited until the pig paused at the edge of a deep depression. When I pressed the trigger, the pig jumped into the depression, scrambled out on the far side, and made off at top speed. 'Have you missed him?' asked Maggie, and with his eyes David put the same question. There was no reason, except miscalculation of the range, why I should not have hit the pig, for my silver foresight had shown up clearly on his back skin, and the tree had assisted me to take steady aim. Anyway, it was time to make for home, and as the cattle track down which the pig had been going would lead us to the Boar Bridge we set off to see the result of my shot. The pig's feet had bitten deeply into the ground where he had taken off, and on the far side of the depression, where he had scrambled out, there was blood. Two hundred yards in the direction in which the pig had gone there was a narrow strip of dense cover. I should probably find him dead in the morning in this cover, for the blood trail was heavy; but if he was not dead and there was trouble, Maggie would not be with me, and there would be more light to shoot by in the morning than there was now.

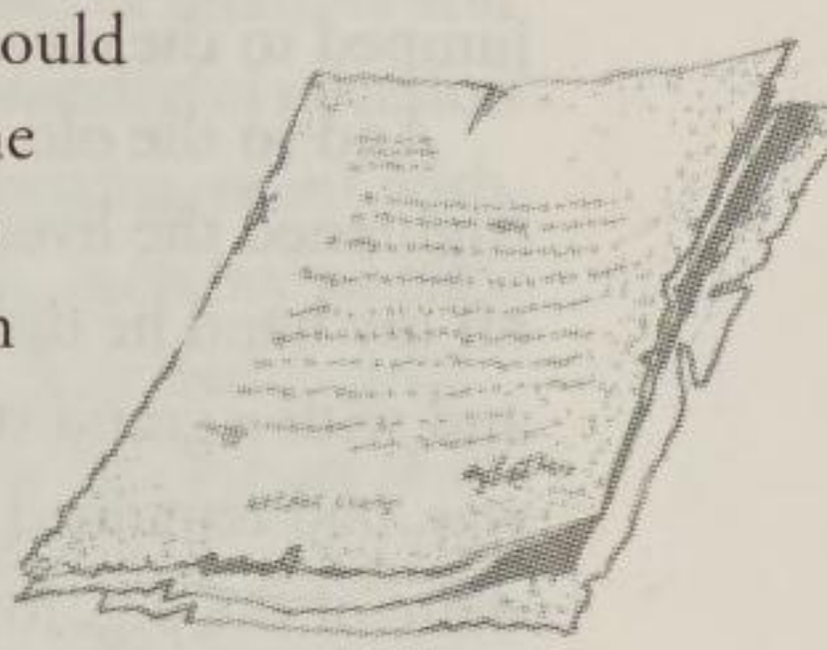
Punwa had heard my shot and was waiting on the bridge for us. 'Yes', I said, in reply to his eager inquiry, 'it was the old pig I fired at, and judging by the blood trail, he is hit hard.' I added that if he met me on the bridge next morning I would show him where the pig was, so that later he could take out a party of men to bring it in. 'May I bring the old *havildar* too?' said Punwa, and I agreed. The *havildar*, a kindly old man who had won the respect and affection of all, was a Gurkha who on leaving the army had joined the police, and having retired a year previously had settled down with his wife and two sons on a plot of land

we had given him in our village. Like all Gurkhas the *havildar* had an insatiable appetite for pig's flesh, and when a pig was shot by any of us it was an understood thing that, no matter who went short, the ex-soldier-policeman must have his share.

Punwa and the *havildar* were waiting for me at the bridge next morning. Following the cattle track, we soon reached the spot where, the previous evening, I had seen the blood. From here we followed the well-defined blood trail which led us, as I had expected, to the dense cover. I left my companions at the edge of the cover, for a wounded pig is a dangerous animal, and with one exception—a bear—is the only animal in our jungles that has the unpleasant habit of savaging any human being who has the misfortune to be attacked and knocked down by him. For this reason wounded pigs, especially if they have big tusks, have to be treated with great respect. The pig had stopped where I had expected him to, but he had not died, and at daybreak he had got up from where he had been lying all night and left the cover. I whistled to Punwa and the *havildar* and when they rejoined me we set off to trail the animal.

The trail led us across the fire-track, and from the direction in which the wounded animal was going it was evident he was making for the heavy jungle on the far side of the hill, from which I suspected he had come the previous evening. The morning blood trail was light and continued to get lighter the farther we went, until we lost it altogether in a belt of trees, the fallen leaves of which a gust of wind had disturbed. In front of us at this spot was a tinder-dry stretch of waist-high grass. Still under the conviction that the pig was heading for the heavy jungle on the far side of the hill, I entered the grass, hoping to pick up the tracks again on the far side.

The *havildar* had lagged some distance behind, but Punwa was immediately behind me when, after we had gone a few yards into the grass, my woollen stockings caught on the thorns of a low bush. While I was stooping to free myself Punwa, to avoid the thorns, moved a few paces to the right and I just got free and was straightening up when out of the grass shot the pig and with an angry grunt went straight for Punwa, who was wearing a white shirt. I then did what I have always asked companions who have accompanied me into the jungles after dangerous game to do if they saw me attacked by a wounded animal. I threw the muzzle of my rifle into the air, and shouted at the top of my voice as I pressed the trigger.



If the thorns had not caught in my stockings and lost me a fraction of a second, all would have been well, for I should have killed the pig before it got to Punwa; but once the pig had reached him the only thing I could do to help him was to try to cause a diversion, for to have fired in his direction would further have endangered his life. As the bullet was leaving my rifle to the land in the jungle a mile away, Punwa, with a despairing scream of 'Sahib', was falling backwards into the grass with the pig right on top of him, but at my shout and the crack of the rifle the pig turned like a whiplash straight for me, and before I was able to eject the spent cartidge and ram a fresh one into the chamber of the ·275 rifle, he was at me. Taking my right hand from the rifle I stretched the arm out palm downwards, and as my hand came in contact with his forehead he stopped dead, for no other reason than that my time had not come, for he was big and angry enough to have knocked over and savaged a cart horse. The pig's body had stopped but his head was very active, and as he cut upwards with his great tusks, first on one side and then on the other, fortunately cutting only the air, he wore the skin off the palm of my hand with his rough forehead. Then, for no apparent reason, he turned away, and as he made off I put two bullets into him in quick succession and he pitched forward on his head.

After that one despairing scream Punwa had made no sound or movement, and with the awful thought of what I would say to his mother, and the still more awful thought of what she would say to me, I went with fear and trembling to where he was lying out of sight in the grass, expecting to find him ripped open from end to end. He was lying full stretch on his back, and his eyes were closed, but to my intense relief I saw no blood on his white clothes. I shook him by the shoulder and asked how he was, and where he had been hurt. In a very weak voice he said he was dead, and that his back was broken. I straddled his body and gently raised him to a sitting position, and was overjoyed to find that he was able to retain this position when I released my hold. Passing my hand down his back I assured him that it was not broken, and after he had verified this fact with his own hand, he turned his head and looked behind him to where a dry stump was projecting two or three inches above the ground. Evidently he had fainted when the pig knocked him

over and, on coming to, feeling the stump boring into his back, had jumped to the conclusion that it was broken.

And so the old pig, son of the *shaitan*, died, and in dying nearly frightened the lives out of the two of us. But beyond rubbing a little skin off my hand he did us no harm, for Punwa escaped without a scratch and with a grand story to tell. The *havildar*, like the wise old soldier he was, had remained in the background. None the less he claimed a lion's share of the pig, for had he not stood foursquare in reserve to render assistance if assistance had been called for? And further, was it not the custom for those present at a killing to receive a double share, and what difference was there between seeing and hearing the shots that had killed the pig? So a double share was not denied him, and he too, in the course of time, had a grand story to tell of the part he took in that morning's exploit.

Punwa now reigns, and is raising a family, in the house I built for his father. Kunthi has left the village to join her husband, and Sher Singh waits in the Happy Hunting Grounds. Punwa's mother is still alive, and if you stop at the village gate and walk through the fields to Punwa's house you will find her keeping house for Punwa and his family and working as hard and as cheerfully at her thousand and one tasks as she worked when she first came to our village as Mothi's bride.

During the war years Maggie spent the winters alone in our cottage at Kaladhungi, without transport, and fourteen miles from the nearest settlement. Her safety gave me no anxiety, for I knew she was safe among my friends, the poor of India.

The Law of the Jungles

Harkwar and Kunthi were married before their total ages had reached double figures. This was quite normal in the India of those days, and would possibly still have been so had Mahatma Gandhi and Miss Mayo never lived.

Harkwar and Kunthi lived in villages a few miles apart at the foot of the great Dunagiri mountain, and had never seen each other until

the great day when, dressed in bright new clothes, they had for all too short a time been the centre of attraction of a vast crowd of relatives and friends. That day lived long in their memories as the wonderful occasion when they had been able to fill their small bellies to bursting-point with *halwa* and *puris*. The day also lived for long years in the memory of their respective fathers, for on it the village *bania*, who was their 'father and mother', realizing their great necessity had provided the few rupees that had enabled them to retain the respect of their community by marrying their children at the age that all children should be married, and on the propitious date selected by the priest of the village—and had made a fresh entry against their names in his register. True, the fifty per cent interest demanded for the accommodation was excessive, but, God willing, a part of it would be paid, for there were other children yet to be married, and who but the good *bania* was there to help them?

Kunthi returned to her father's home after her wedding and for the next few years performed all the duties that children are called upon to perform in the homes of the very poor. The only difference her married state made in her life was that she was no longer permitted to wear the one-piece dress that unmarried girls wear. Her new costume now consisted of three pieces, a *chaddar* a yard and a half long, one end of which was tucked into her skirt and the other draped over her head, a tiny sleeveless bodice, and a skirt a few inches long.

Several uneventful and carefree years went by for Kunthi until the day came when she was judged old enough to join her husband. Once again the *bania* came to the rescue and, arrayed in her new clothes, a very tearful girl-bride set out for the home of her boy-husband. The change from one home to another only meant for Kunthi the performing of chores for her mother-in-law which she had previously performed for her mother. There are no drones in a poor man's household in India; young and old have their allotted work to do and they do it cheerfully. Kunthi was now old enough to help with the cooking, and as soon as the morning meal had been eaten all who were capable of working for wages set to perform their respective tasks, which, no matter how minor they were, brought grist to the family mill. Harkwar's father was a mason and was engaged on building a chapel at the American Mission School. It was Harkwar's ambition to follow in his father's profession and, until he had the strength to do so, he helped the family exchequer by carrying the materials used by his father and

the other masons, earning two annas a day for his ten hours' labour. The crops on the low irrigated lands were ripening, and after Kunthi had washed and polished the metal pots and pans used for the morning meal she accompanied her mother-in-law and her numerous sisters-in-law to the fields of the headman of the village, where with other women and girls she laboured as many hours as her husband for half the wage he received. When the day's work was done the family walked back in the twilight to the hut Harkwar's father had been permitted to build on the headman's land, and with the dry sticks the younger children had collected during their elders' absence, the evening meal was cooked and eaten. Except for the fire, there had never been any other form of illumination in the hut, and when the pots and pans had been cleaned and put away, each member of the family retired to his or her allotted place, Harkwar and his brothers sleeping with their father and Kunthi sleeping with the other female members of the family.

When Harkwar was eighteen and Kunthi sixteen, they left and, carrying their few possessions, set up home in a hut placed at their disposal by an uncle of Harkwar's in a village three miles from the cantonment of Ranikhet. A number of barracks were under construction in the cantonment and Harkwar had no difficulty in finding work as a mason; nor had Kunthi any difficulty in finding work as a labourer, carrying stones from a quarry to the site of the building.

For four years the young couple worked on the barracks at Ranikhet, and during this period Kunthi had two children. In November of the fourth year the buildings were completed and Harkwar and Kunthi had to find new work, for their savings were small and would only keep them in food for a few days.

Winter set in early that year and promised to be unusually severe. The family had no warm clothes, and after a week's unsuccessful search for work Harkwar suggested that they should migrate to the foothills where he heard a canal headworks was being constructed. So, early in December, the family set out in high spirits on their long walk to the foothills. The distance between the village in which they had made their home for four years and the canal headworks at Kaladhungi, where they hoped to procure work, was roughly fifty miles. Sleeping

under trees at night, toiling up and down steep and rough roads during the day, and carrying all their worldly possessions and the children by turns, Harkwar and Kunthi, tired and footsore, accomplished the journey to Kaladhungi in six days.

Other landless members of the depressed class had migrated earlier in the winter from the high hills to the foothills and built themselves communal huts capable of housing as many as thirty families. In these huts Harkwar and Kunthi were unable to find accommodation, so they had to build a hut for themselves. They chose a site at the edge of the forest where there was an abundant supply of fuel, within easy reach of the bazaar, and laboured early and late on a small hut of branches and leaves, for their supply of hard cash had dwindled to a few rupees and there was no friendly *bania* here to whom they could turn for help.

The forest at the edge of which Harkwar and Kunthi built their hut was a favourite hunting-ground of mine. I had first entered it carrying my old muzzle-loader to shoot red jungle fowl and pea fowl for the family larder, and later I had penetrated to every corner, armed with a modern rifle, in search of big game. At the time Harkwar and Kunthi and their two children, Punwa, a boy aged three, and Putali, a girl aged two, took up their residence in the hut, there were in that forest, to my certain knowledge, five tigers; eight leopards; a family of four sloth bears; two Himalayan black bears, which had come down from the high hills to feed on wild plums and honey; a number of hyenas who had their burrows in the grasslands five miles away and who visited the forest nightly to feed on the discarded portions of the tigers' and leopards' kills; a pair of wild dogs; numerous jackals and foxes and pine martens; and a variety of civet and other cats. There were also two pythons, many kinds of snakes, crested and tawny eagles, and hundreds of vultures in the forest. I have not mentioned animals such as deer, antelope, pigs, and monkeys, which are harmless to human beings, for they have no part in my story.

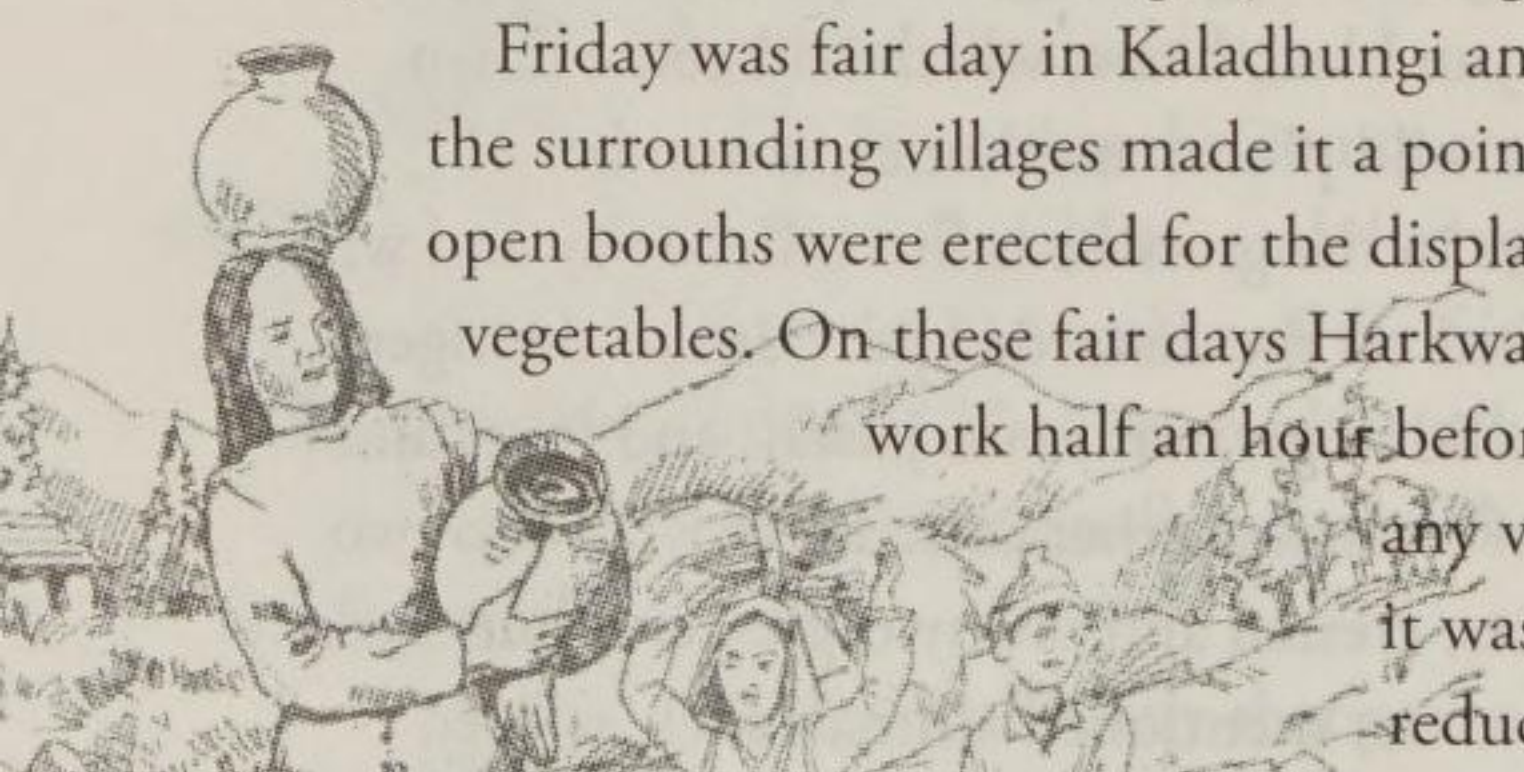
The day after the flimsy hut was completed, Harkwar found work as a qualified mason on a daily wage of eight annas with the contractor who was building the canal headworks, and Kunthi purchased for two rupees a permit from the Forest Department which entitled her to cut grass on the foothills, which she sold as fodder for the cattle of the shopkeepers in the bazaar. For her bundle of green grass weighing anything up to eighty

pounds and which necessitated a walk of from ten to fourteen miles, mostly up and down steep hills, Kunthi received four annas, one anna of which was taken by the man who held the Government contract for sale of grass in the bazaar. On the eight annas earned by Harkwar, plus the three annas earned by Kunthi, the family of four lived in comparative comfort, for food was plentiful and cheap and for the first time in their lives they were able to afford one meat meal a month.

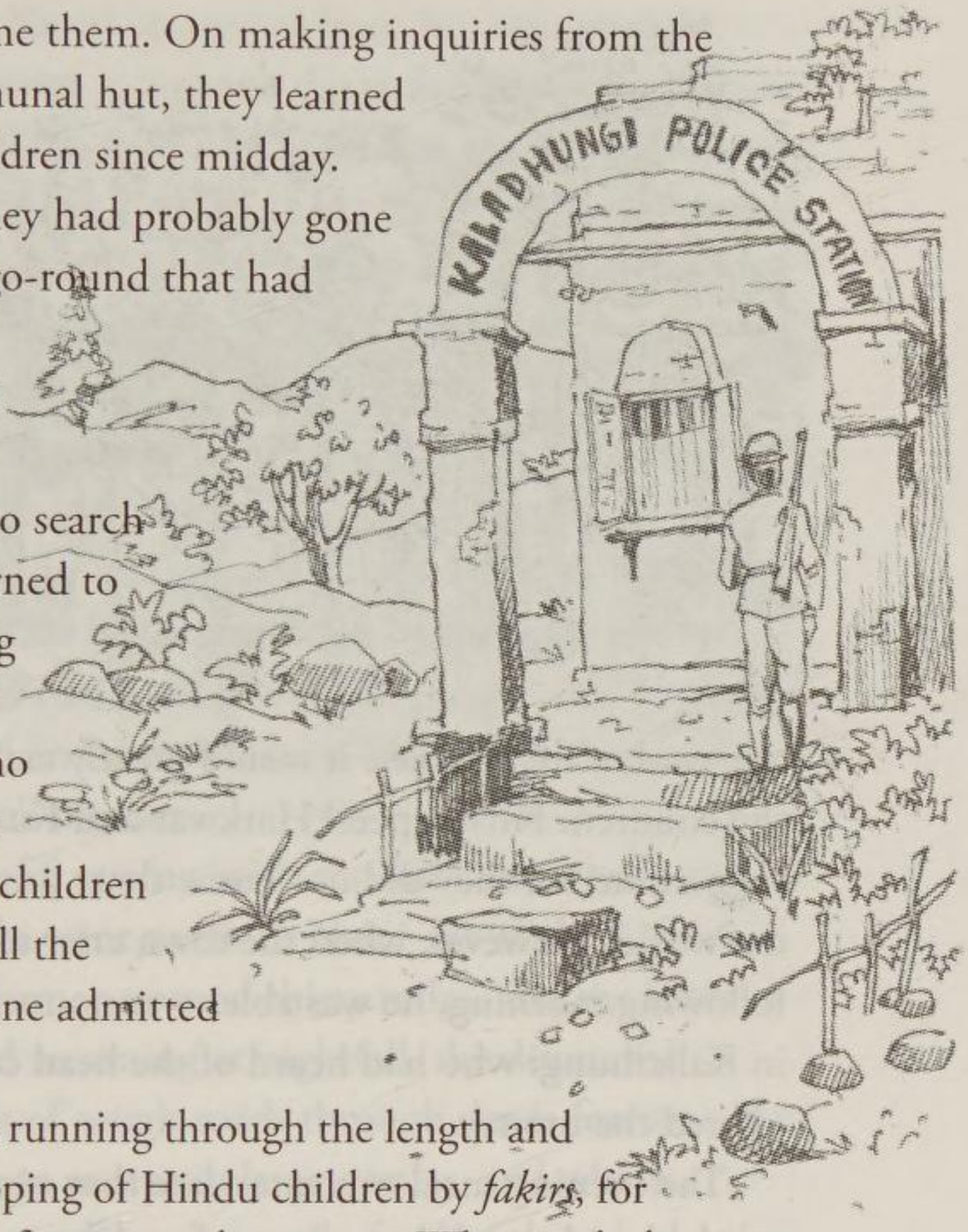
Two of the three months that Harkwar and Kunthi intended spending in Kaladhungi passed very peacefully. The hours of work were long, and admitted of no relaxation, but to that they had been accustomed from childhood. The weather was perfect, the children kept in good health, and except during the first few days while the hut was being built they had never gone hungry.

The children had in the beginning been an anxiety, for they were too young to accompany Harkwar to the canal headworks, or Kunthi on her long journeys in search of grass. Then a kindly old crippled woman living in the communal hut a few hundred yards away came to the rescue by offering to keep a general eye on the children while the parents were away at work. This arrangement worked satisfactorily for two months, and each evening when Harkwar returned from the canal headworks four miles away, and Kunthi returned a little later after selling her grass in the bazaar, they found Punwa and Putali eagerly awaiting their return.

Friday was fair day in Kaladhungi and on that day everyone in the surrounding villages made it a point to visit the bazaar, where open booths were erected for the display of cheap food, fruit, and vegetables. On these fair days Harkwar and Kunthi returned from work half an hour before their usual time, for if any vegetables had been left over it was possible to buy them at a reduced price before the booths closed down for the night.



One particular Friday, when Harkwar and Kunthi returned to the hut after making their modest purchases of vegetables and a pound of goat's meat, Punwa and Putali



were not at the hut to welcome them. On making inquiries from the crippled woman at the communal hut, they learned that she had not seen the children since midday. The woman suggested that they had probably gone to the bazaar to see a merry-go-round that had attracted all the children from the communal hut, and as this seemed a reasonable explanation Harkwar set off to search the bazaar while Kunthi returned to the hut to prepare the evening meal. An hour later Harkwar returned with several men who had assisted him in his search to report that no trace of the children could be found, and that of all the people he had questioned, none admitted having seen them.

At that time a rumour was running through the length and breadth of India of the kidnapping of Hindu children by *fakirs*, for sale on the north-west frontier for immoral purposes. What truth there was in this rumour I am unable to say, but I had frequently read in the daily press of *fakirs* being manhandled, and on several occasions being rescued by the police from crowds intent on lynching them. It is safe to say that every parent in India had heard these rumours, and when Harkwar and the friends who had helped him in his search returned to the hut, they communicated their fears to Kunthi that the children had been kidnapped by the *fakirs*, who had probably come to the fair for that purpose.

At the lower end of the village there was a police station in charge of a head constable and two constables. To this police station Harkwar and Kunthi repaired, with a growing crowd of well-wishers. The head constable was a kindly old man who had children of his own, and after he had listened sympathetically to the distracted parents' story, and recorded their statements in his diary, he said that nothing could be done that night, but that next morning he would send the town crier round to all the fifteen villages in Kaladhungi to announce the loss of the children. He then suggested that if the town crier could announce

a reward of fifty rupees, it would greatly assist in the safe return of the children. Fifty rupees! Harkwar and Kunthi were aghast at the suggestion, for they did not know there was so much money in all the world. However, when the town crier set out on his round the following morning, he was able to announce the reward, for a man in Kaladhungi who had heard of the head constable's suggestion had offered the money.

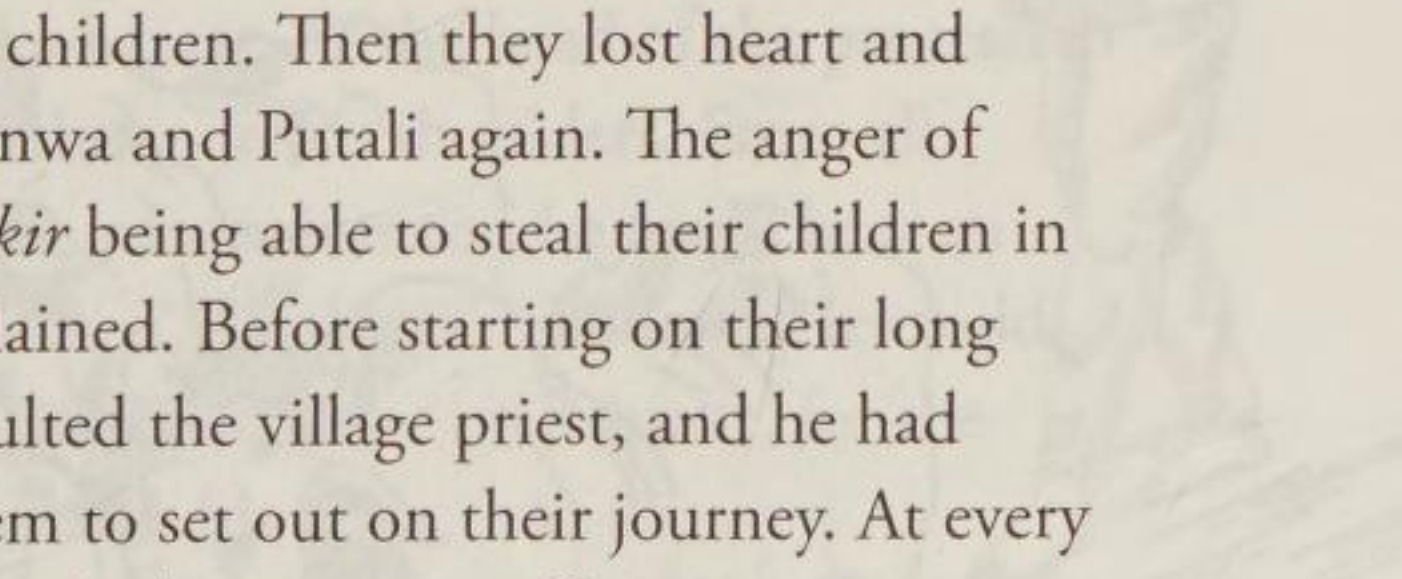
The evening meal was eaten late that night. The childrens' portion was laid aside, and throughout the night a small fire was kept burning, for it was bitterly cold, and at short intervals Harkwar and Kunthi went out into the night to call to their children, though they knew there was no hope of receiving an answer.

At Kaladhungi two roads cross each other at right angles, one running along the foot of the hills from Haldwani to Ramnagar, and the other running from Naini Tal to Bazpur. During that Friday night, sitting close to the small fire to keep themselves warm, Harkwar and Kunthi decided that if the children did not turn up by morning, they would go along the former road and make inquiries, as this was the most likely route for the kidnapper to have taken. At daybreak on Saturday morning they went to the police station to tell the head constable of their decision, and were instructed to lodge a report at the Haldwani and Ramnagar police stations. They were greatly heartened when the head constable told them that he was sending a letter by mail runner to no less a person than the Inspector of Police at Haldwani, requesting him to telegraph to all railway junctions to keep a look-out for the children, a description of whom he was sending with his letter.

Near sunset that evening Kunthi returned from her twenty-eight-mile walk to Haldwani and went straight to the police station to inquire about her children and to tell the head constable that, though her quest had been fruitless, she had lodged a report as instructed at the Haldwani police station. Shortly afterwards Harkwar returned from his thirty-six-mile walk to Ramnagar, and he too went straight to the police station to make inquiries and to report that he had found no trace of the children, but had carried out the head constable's instructions. Many friends, including a number of mothers who feared for the safety of their own children, were waiting at the hut to express their sympathy for Harkwar and for Punwa's mother—for, as is the custom in India, Kunthi when she married lost the name she had been given at birth and until Punwa was born had been addressed and referred to as 'Harkwar's wife', and after Punwa's birth as 'Punwa's mother'.

Sunday was a repetition of Saturday, with the difference that instead of going east and west Kunthi went north to Naini Tal while Harkwar went south to Bazpur. The former covered thirty miles, and the latter thirty-two. Starting early and returning at nightfall, the distracted parents traversed many miles of rough roads through dense forests, where people do not usually go except in large parties, and where Harkwar and Kunthi would not have dreamed of going alone had not anxiety for their children overcome their fear of dacoits and of wild animals.

On that Sunday evening, weary and hungry, they returned to their hut from their fruitless visit to Naini Tal and to Bazpur, to be met by the news that the town crier's visit to the villages and the police inquiries had failed to find any trace of the children. Then they lost heart and gave up all hope of ever seeing Punwa and Putali again. The anger of the gods, that had resulted in a *fakir* being able to steal their children in broad daylight, was not to be explained. Before starting on their long walk from the hills they had consulted the village priest, and he had selected the propitious day for them to set out on their journey. At every shrine they had passed they had made the requisite offering; at one place, a dry bit of wood, in another a small strip of cloth torn from the hem of Kunthi's *chaddar*, and in yet another a pice, which they could ill afford. And here, at Kaladhungi, every time they passed the temple that their low caste did not permit them to



enter, they had never failed to raise their clasped hands in supplication. Why then had this great misfortune befallen them, who had done all that the gods demanded of them and who had never wronged any man?

Monday found the pair too dispirited and too tired to leave their hut. There was no food, and would be none until they resumed work. But of what use was it to work now, when the children for whom they had ungrudgingly laboured from morn to night were gone? So, while friends came and went, offering what sympathy they could. Harkwar sat at the door of the hut staring into a bleak and hopeless future, while Kunthi, her tears all gone, sat in a corner, hour after hour, rocking herself to and fro, to and fro.

On that Monday a man of my acquaintance was herding buffaloes in the jungle in which lived the wild animals and birds I have mentioned. He was a simple soul who had spent the greater part of his life in the jungles herding the buffaloes of the headman at Patabpur village. He knew the danger from the tigers, and near sundown he collected the buffaloes and started to drive them to the village, along a cattle track that ran through the densest part of the jungle. Presently he noticed that as each buffalo got to a certain spot in the track it turned its head to the right and stopped, until urged on by the horns of the animal following. When he got to this spot he also turned his head to the right, and in a little depression a few feet from the track saw two small children lying.

He had been in the jungle with his buffaloes when the town crier had made his round of the villages on Saturday, but that night, and the following night also, the kidnapping of Harkwar's children had been the topic of conversation round the village fire, as in fact it had been round every village fire in the whole of Kaladhungi. Here then were the missing children for

whom a reward of fifty rupees had been offered. But why had they been murdered and brought to this remote spot? The children were naked, and were clasped in each other's arms. The herdsman descended into the depression and squatted down on his hunkers to determine, if he could, how the children had met their death. That the children were dead he was convinced, yet now as he sat closely scrutinizing them he suddenly saw that they were breathing; that in fact they were not dead, but sound asleep. He was a father himself, and very gently he touched the children and roused them. To touch them was a crime against his caste, for he was a Brahmin and they were low-caste children, but what mattered caste in an emergency like this? So, leaving his buffaloes to find their own way home, he picked up the children, who were too weak to walk, and set out for the Kaladhungi bazaar with one on each shoulder. The man was not too strong himself, for like all who live in the foothills he had suffered much from malaria. The children were an awkward load and had to be held in position. Moreover, as all the cattle tracks and game paths in this jungle run from north to south, and his way lay from east to west, he had to make frequent detours to avoid impenetrable thickets and deep ravines. But he carried on manfully, resting every now and then in the course of his six-mile walk. Putali was beyond speech, but Punwa was able to talk a little and all the explanation he could give for their being in the jungle was that they had been playing and had got lost.

Harkwar was sitting at the door of his hut staring into the darkening night, in which points of light were beginning to appear as a lantern or cooking-fire was lit here and there, when he saw a small crowd of people appearing from the direction of the bazaar. At the head of the procession a man was walking, carrying something on his shoulders. From all sides people were converging on the procession and he could hear an excited murmur of 'Harkwar's children'. Harkwar's children! He could not believe his ears, and yet there appeared to be no mistake, for the procession was coming straight towards his hut.

Kunthi, having reached the limit of her misery and of her physical endurance, had fallen asleep curled up in a corner of the hut. Harkwar shook her awake and got her to the door just as the herdsman carrying Punwa and Putali reached it.

When the tearful greetings, and blessings and thanks for the rescuer, and the congratulations of friends had partly subsided, the question of

the reward the herdsman had earned was mooted. To a poor man fifty rupees was wealth untold, and with it the herdsman could buy three buffaloes, or ten cows, and be independent for life. But the rescuer was a better man than the crowd gave him credit for. The blessings and thanks that had been showered on his head that night, he said, was reward enough for him, and he stoutly refused to touch one pice of the fifty rupees. Nor would Harkwar or Kunthi accept the reward either as a gift or a loan. They had got back the children they had lost all hope of ever seeing again, and would resume work as their strength returned. In the meantime the milk and sweets and *puris* that one and another of the assembled people, out of the goodness of their hearts, had run to the bazaar to fetch would be amply sufficient to sustain them.

Two-year-old Putali and three-year-old Punwa were lost at midday on Friday, and were found by the herdsman at about 5 p.m. on Monday, a matter of seventy-seven hours. I have given a description of the wild life which to my knowledge was in the forest in which the children spent those seventy-seven hours, and it would be unreasonable to assume that none of the animals or birds saw, heard, or smelt the children. And yet, when the herdsman put Putali and Punwa into their parents' arms, there was not a single mark of tooth or claw on them.

I once saw a tigress stalking a month-old kid. The ground was very open and the kid saw the tigress while she was still some distance away and started bleating, whereon the tigress gave up her stalk and walked straight up to it. When the tigress had approached to within a few yards, the kid went forward to meet her, and on reaching the tigress stretched out its neck and put up its head to smell her. For the duration of a few

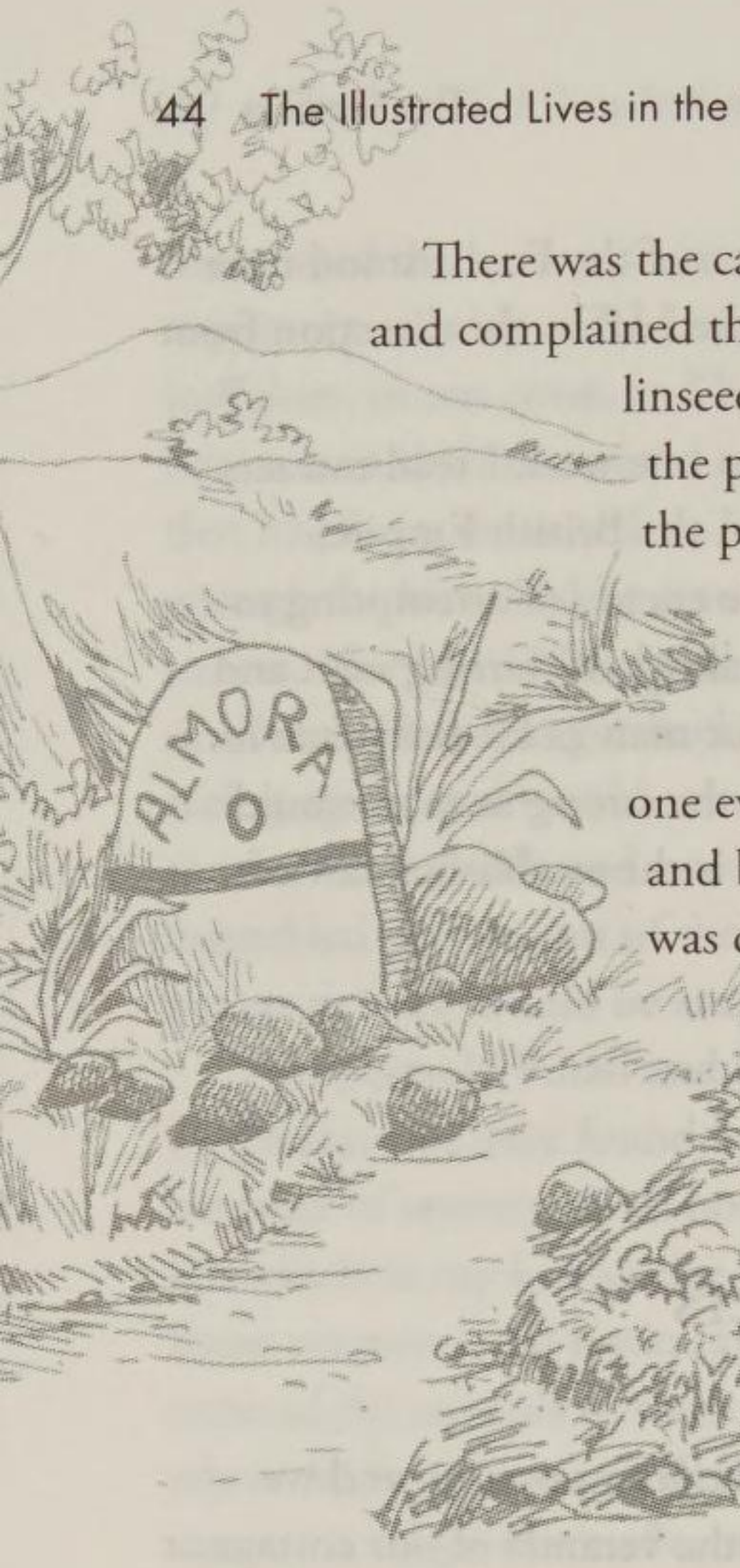
heart beats the month-old kid and the Queen of the Forest stood nose to nose, and then the queen turned and walked off in the direction from which she had come.

When Hitler's war was nearing its end, in one week I read extracts from speeches of three of the greatest men in the British Empire, condemning war atrocities, and accusing the enemy of attempting to introduce the 'law of the jungle' into the dealings of warring man and man. Had the Creator made the same law for man as He has made for the jungle folk, there would be no wars, for the strong in man would have the same consideration for the weak as is the established law of the jungles.

The Brothers

The long years of training boys for jungle warfare were over, and we were sitting one morning after breakfast on the veranda of our cottage at Kaladhungi. My sister Maggie was knitting a khaki pullover for me, and I was putting the finishing touches to a favourite fly-rod that suffered from years of disuse, when a man wearing a clean but much-patched cotton suit walked up the steps of the veranda with a broad grin on his face, *salaamed*, and asked if we remembered him.

Many people, clean and not so clean, old and young, rich and poor (but mostly poor), Hindus, Mohammedans, and Christians, walked up those steps, for our cottage was at a cross-roads at the foot of the hills and on the border line between the cultivated land and the forest. All who were sick or sorry, in want of a helping hand, or in need of a little human companionship and a cup of tea, whether living on the cultivated land or working in the forest or just passing on their way from one place to another, found their way to our cottage. Had a record been maintained over the years of only the sick and injured treated, it would have had thousands of names in it. And the cases dealt with would have covered every ailment that human flesh is heir to—and subject to, when living in an unhealthy area, working in forests on dangerous jobs among animals who occasionally lose their tempers.



There was the case of the woman who came one morning and complained that her son had great difficulty in eating the linseed poultice that had been given to her the previous evening to apply on a boil: as the poultice did not appear to have done the boy any good, she asked to have the medicine changed. And the case of the old Mohammedan woman who came late one evening, with tears streaming down her face, and begged Maggie to save her husband who was dying of pneumonia. She looked askance at the tablets of M.&B. 693 and asked if that was all that was to be given to a dying man to make him well; but next day she returned with a beaming countenance to report that her husband had recovered, and begged for the same kind of medicine for the four friends she had brought with her, each of whom had husbands as old as hers who might at any time get pneumonia.

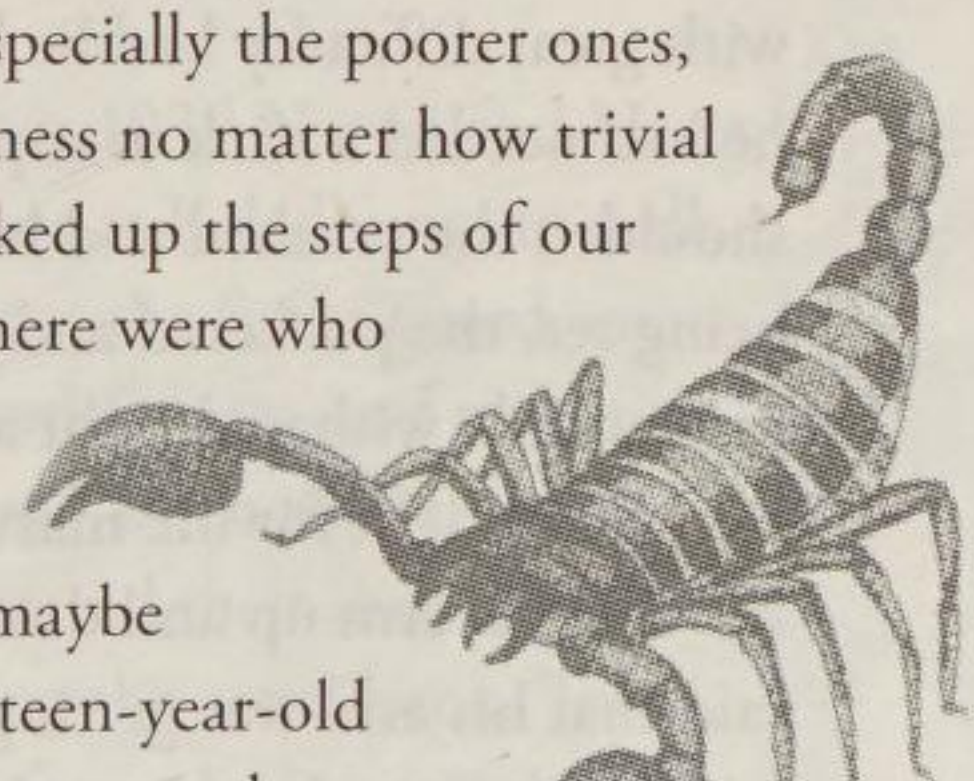
And there was the case of the girl about eight years old, who, after some difficulty in reaching the latch of the gate, marched up to the veranda firmly holding the hand of a boy some two years younger, and asked for medicine for the boy's sore eyes. She sat herself down on the ground, made the boy lie on his back, and having got his head between her knees said, 'Now, Miss Sahib, you can do anything you like to him.' This girl was the daughter of the headman of a village six miles away. Seeing her class mate suffering from sore eyes, she had taken it upon herself to bring him to Maggie for treatment, and for a whole week, until his eyes were quite well, the young Samaritan brought the boy to the cottage, though in order to do so she had to walk an additional four miles each day.

Then there was the case of the sawyer from Delhi, who limped into the compound one day with his right leg ripped open by the tusk of a pig from his heel to the back of his knee. All the time his leg was

being attended to he swore at the unclean beast that had done this terrible thing to him, for he was a follower of the Prophet. His story was that when that morning he had approached the tree he had felled the previous day, to saw it up, a pig which had been sheltering among the branches ran against him and cut his leg. When I suggested that it was his own fault for having got in the way of the pig, he indignantly exclaimed: 'With the whole jungle to run about in, what need was there for it to have run against me when I had done nothing to offend it, and in fact before I had even seen it?'

There was another sawyer too. While turning over a log he had been stung on the palm of his hand by a scorpion 'as big as this'. After treatment, he rolled on the ground loudly lamenting his fate and asserting that the medicine was doing him no good, but not long after he was observed to be holding his sides and choking with laughter. It was the day of the children's annual fête, and when the races had been run and the two hundred children and their mothers had been fed on sweets and fruit, a circle had been formed. A blindfolded boy had been set to break a paper bag containing nuts of all kinds, which was slung between two bamboos held upright by two men; and it was when the boy brought his stick down on the head of one of these men that the scorpion patient was found to be laughing the loudest of all the assembly. When asked how the pain now was the man replied that it had gone, and that in any case he would not mind how many scorpions stung him provided he could take part in a *tamasha* like this.

The members of our family have been amateur physicians for more years than I can remember, and as Indians, especially the poorer ones, have long memories, and never forget a kindness no matter how trivial it may have been, not all the people who walked up the steps of our cottage at Kaladhungi were patients. Many there were who had marched for days over rough tracks in all weathers to thank us for small kindnesses shown to them, maybe the previous year, or maybe many years previously. One of these was a sixteen-year-old boy, who with his mother had been housed for some days in our village while Maggie treated his mother for influenza and badly inflamed eyes; now he had done a march of many days to bring Maggie his mother's thanks and a present of a few pomegranates which his mother had picked for her 'with her own hand'. And only that



day, an hour before the man wearing the patched suit had arrived, an old man had walked up the steps and seated himself on the veranda with his back to one of the pillars and, after looking at me for some time, had shaken his head in a disapproving manner and said, 'You are looking much older, Sahib, than you were when I last saw you.' 'Yes', I replied, 'all of us are apt to look older after ten years.' 'Not all of us, Sahib,' he rejoined, 'for I look and feel no older than when I last sat in your veranda not ten, but twelve years ago. On that occasion I was returning on foot from a pilgrimage to Badrinath, and seeing your gate open, and being tired and in urgent need of ten rupees, I asked you to let me rest for a while, and appealed to you for help. I am now returning from another pilgrimage, this time to the sacred city of Benares. I am in no need of money and have only come to thank you for the help you gave me before and to tell you that I got home safely. After this smoke, and a little rest, I shall return to rejoin my family, whom I left at Haldwani.' A fourteen-mile walk each way. And in spite of his assertion that twelve years had not made him look or feel any older, he was a frail old man.

Though the face of the man in the patched cotton suit who now stood before us on the veranda was vaguely familiar, we could not remember his name or the circumstances in which we had last seen him. Seeing that he was not recognized, the man removed his coat, opened his shirt, and exposed his chest and right shoulder. That shoulder brought him to instant memory. He was Narwa. Narwa the basket-maker, and there was some excuse for our not having recognized him, for when we had last seen him, six years previously, he was mere skin and bone; only with great difficulty had he been able to put one foot before another, and he had needed a stick to support himself. Looking now at his misshapen shoulder, the crushed and broken bones of which had calloused without being set, the puckered and discoloured skin of his chest and back, and his partially withered right arm, we who for three months had watched his gallant fight for life marvelled how well he had survived his ordeal. Moving his arm up and down, and closing and opening his hand, Narwa said that his arm was getting stronger every day. His fingers had not got stiff, as we feared they would, so he had been able to resume his trade. His object now, he said, was to show us that he was quite well and to thank Maggie—which he proceeded to do by putting his head on her feet—for having supplied all his wants, and the wants of his wife and child, during the months he had lain between life and death.

Narwa's Ordeal

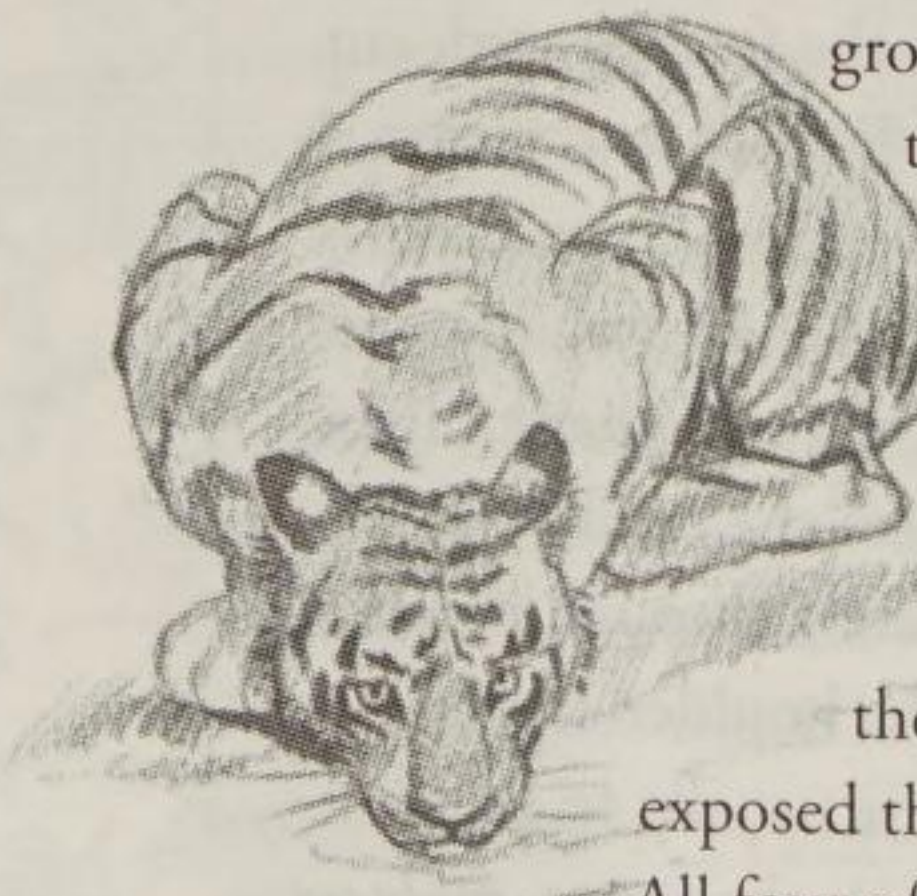
Narwa and Haria were not blood brothers, though they so described themselves. They had been born and had grown up in the same village near Almora, and when old enough to work had adopted the same profession, basket-making—which means that they were untouchables, for in the United Provinces baskets are only made by untouchables. During the summer months Narwa and Haria worked at their trade in their village near Almora, and in the winter months they came down to Kaladhungi where there was a great demand for the huge baskets, measuring up to fifteen feet in diameter, which they made for our villagers for the storage of grain. In their hill village near Almora they made their baskets of ringals—thin bamboo an inch thick and up to twenty feet long, which grows at an altitude of four to ten thousand feet, and which incidentally makes the most perfect of fly-rods—and in Kaladhungi they made them of bamboos.

The bamboos in Kaladhungi grow in the Government Reserved Forests, and we who cultivate land near the Reserved Forests are permitted to cut a certain number each year for our personal use. But people who use the bamboos for commercial purposes have to take out a licence from the forest guard of the area, paying two annas per headload, and a small consideration to the forest guard for his trouble in filling in the licence. As the licence is a personal one and covers an individual headload it is safe to assume that as many lengths of two-year-old bamboos—the age when a bamboo is best for basket-making—were included in the load as a man could carry.

At daybreak on the morning of 26 December 1939 Narwa and Haria set out from their communal hut near the bazaar at Kaladhungi to walk eight miles to Nalni village, obtain a licence from the forest guard, cut two headloads of bamboos in the Nalni Reserved Forests, and return to Kaladhungi the same evening. It was bitterly cold when they started, so the two men wrapped coarse cotton sheets round their shoulders to keep out the cold. For a mile their way ran along the canal bank. Then, after negotiating the series of high walls which form the headworks of the canal, they took a footpath which runs alternately through patches of dense scrub jungle and over long stretches of the boulder-strewn bank of the Boar river, stretches where a pair of otters are usually to be seen in the early morning, and where, when the sun is on the water, *mahseer*

up to three or four pounds can be taken on a fly-rod. Two miles up they crossed by a shallow ford from the right to the left bank of the river and entered a tree and grass jungle, where morning and evening are to be seen several small herds of *chital* and *sambhar*, and an occasional *kakar*, leopard, or tiger. A mile through this jungle, they came to where the hills converge, and where some years previously Robin picked up the tracks of the Bachelor of Powalgarh. From this point onwards the valley opens out and is known to all who graze cattle, or who poach or shoot in the area, as Samal Chour. In this valley one has to walk warily, for the footpath is used almost as much by tigers as it is by human beings.

At the upper end of the valley the footpath, before going steeply up the hill for two miles to Nalni village, passes through a strip of grass. This strip of eight-foot grass is thirty yards wide and extends for about fifty yards on either side of the path. In anticipation of the stiff climb up the Nalni hill, shortly before reaching the grass Narwa divested himself of his cotton sheet, folded it small and placed it on his right shoulder. Haria was leading, with Narwa following a few steps behind, and he had only gone three or four yards into the grass when he heard the angry roar of a tiger, and simultaneously a shriek from Narwa. Haria turned and dashed back, and on the open ground at the edge of the grass he saw Narwa on his back with a tiger lying diagonally across him. Narwa's feet were nearest to him, and grasping an ankle in each hand he started to pull him away from under the tiger. As he did this the tiger stood up, turned towards him and started to growl. After dragging Narwa along on his back for a short distance Haria got his arms round him and set him on his feet. But Narwa was too badly injured and shaken to stand or walk, so Haria put his arms round him, and alternately dragged and carried him—while the tiger continued to growl—through the open ground skirting the grass, and so regained the path to Nalni village. By superhuman efforts Haria eventually got Narwa to Nalni, where it was found that in spite of the folded sheet which he had been carrying on his right shoulder, and which Haria had retrieved while pulling him away, the tiger had crushed the bones of the shoulder, lacerated the flesh, and exposed the bones on the right side of the chest and back. All four of the tiger's canine teeth had penetrated some



eight folds of the sheet, and but for this obstruction they would have met in Narwa's chest and inflicted a fatal wound.

The forest guard and the people in Nalni were unable to do anything for Narwa, so Haria hired a pack pony for two rupees, mounted Narwa on it, and set out for Kaladhungi. The distance, as I have already said, was eight miles, but Haria was unwilling to face the tiger a second time so he made a wide detour through Musabanga village, adding ten miles to Narwa's agonizing journey. There were no saddles at Nalni and he had been mounted on a hard pack used for carrying grain, and the first nine miles of his ride was over incredibly steep and rough ground.

Maggie was having tea on the veranda of our cottage when Narwa, soaked in blood and being held on the pony by Haria, arrived at the steps. A glance was enough to show that the case was one she could not deal with, so she quickly gave Narwa a stiff dose of sal volatile—for he was on the point of fainting—and made a sling for his arm. Then she tore up a bed sheet to be used for bandages and wrote a note to the Assistant Surgeon in charge of the Kaladhungi hospital, begging him to attend to Narwa immediately, and do all he could for him. She gave the note to our head boy and sent him to the hospital with the two men.

I was out bird shooting that day with a party of friends who were spending their Christmas holiday at Kaladhungi, and when I returned in the late evening Maggie told me about Narwa. Early next morning I was at the hospital, where I was informed by a very young and very inexperienced doctor that he had done all he could for Narwa, but as he had little hope of his recovery, and no arrangements for in-patients, he had sent Narwa home after treating him. In the large communal hut, which housed about twenty families, each of which appeared to have a record number of small children, I found Narwa lying in a corner on a bed of straw and leaves. It was the last place for a man in his terrible condition to be in, for his wounds were showing signs of getting septic. For a week Narwa lay in the corner of the noisy and insanitary hut, at times raving in high fever, at times in a state of coma, watched over by his weeping wife, and his devoted 'brother' Haria, and by other friends. It was now apparent, even to my inexperienced eyes, that if Narwa's septic wounds were not opened up, drained, and cleaned, there was a certainty of the doctor's predictions being fulfilled, so, after making arrangements for his care while under treatment, I removed him to the hospital. To give the young doctor

credit, when he undertook to do a job he did it thoroughly, and many of the long scars on his chest and back that Narwa will carry to the burning-ghat were made not by the tiger but by the doctor's lancet, which he used very freely.

With the exception of professional beggars, the poor in India can only eat when they work, and as Narwa's wife's days were fully occupied in visiting him at the hospital, and later in nursing him when he returned to the communal hut, and in caring for her three-year-old girl and her young baby, Maggie supplied all Narwa's wants,[1] and the wants of his family. Three months later, reduced to skin and bone and with a right arm that looked as though it could never be used again, Narwa crawled from the hut to our cottage to bid us goodbye and the next day he and Haria and their families set out for their village near Almora.

After visiting Narwa in the communal hut that first morning, and getting a firsthand account of the incident from Haria, I was convinced that the tiger's encounter with Narwa was accidental. However, to satisfy myself that my reconstruction of the event was right—and to shoot the tiger if I was wrong—I followed, foot by foot, the track the brothers had taken the previous day when on their way to Nalni village. For a few yards the track runs along the edge of the strip of high grass at the foot of the Nalni hill, before turning at right angles to cross the grass. Shortly before the two men arrived at this spot, the tiger had killed a *sambhar* stag and carried it into the grass close to the right-hand side of the track. When Haria entered the grass the tiger heard the rustling, and coming out, ran into Narwa, who was a few yards behind Haria and a yard or two from the turning. The encounter was accidental, for the grass was too thick and too high for the tiger to have seen Narwa before he bumped into him. Furthermore it had made no attempt to savage Narwa, and had even allowed Haria to drag the man on whom it was lying away from under it. So the tiger was allowed to live, and was later induced to join the party of tigers that are mentioned in the chapter 'Just Tigers' in *Man-eaters of Kumaon.*

Of all the brave deeds that I have witnessed, or that I have read or heard about, I count Haria's rescue of Narwa the greatest. Unarmed and alone in a great expanse of jungle, to respond to the cry of a companion in distress and to pull that companion away from an angry

[1] Small hospitals in India do not provide either attendants or food for patients.

tiger that was lying on him, and then to drag and carry that companion for two miles up a steep hill to a place of safety, not knowing but that the tiger was following, needed a degree of courage that is given to few, and that any man could envy. When I took down Haria's statement—which was later corroborated in every detail by Narwa—with the object, unknown to him, of his act receiving recognition, so far from thinking that he had done anything deserving of commendation, after I had finished questioning him he said: 'I have not done anything, Sahib, have I, that is likely to bring trouble on me or on my brother Narwa?' And Narwa, a few days later, when I took down what I feared would be his dying declaration, said in a voice racked with pain and little above a whisper, 'Don't let my brother get into any trouble, Sahib, for it was not his fault that the tiger attacked me, and he risked his life to save mine'.

I should have liked to have been able to end my story by telling you that Haria's brave act, and Narwa's heroic fight for life against great odds, had been acknowledged by a certificate of merit, or some other small token of award, for both were poor men. Unfortunately red tape proved too much for me, for the Government were not willing to make any award in a case of which the truth could not be sworn to by independent and unbiased witnesses.

So one of the bravest deeds ever performed has gone unrecognized because there were no 'independent and unbiased witnesses'; and of the brothers Haria is the poorer of the two, for he has nothing to show for the part he played, while Narwa has his scars and the sheet with many holes, stained with his blood.

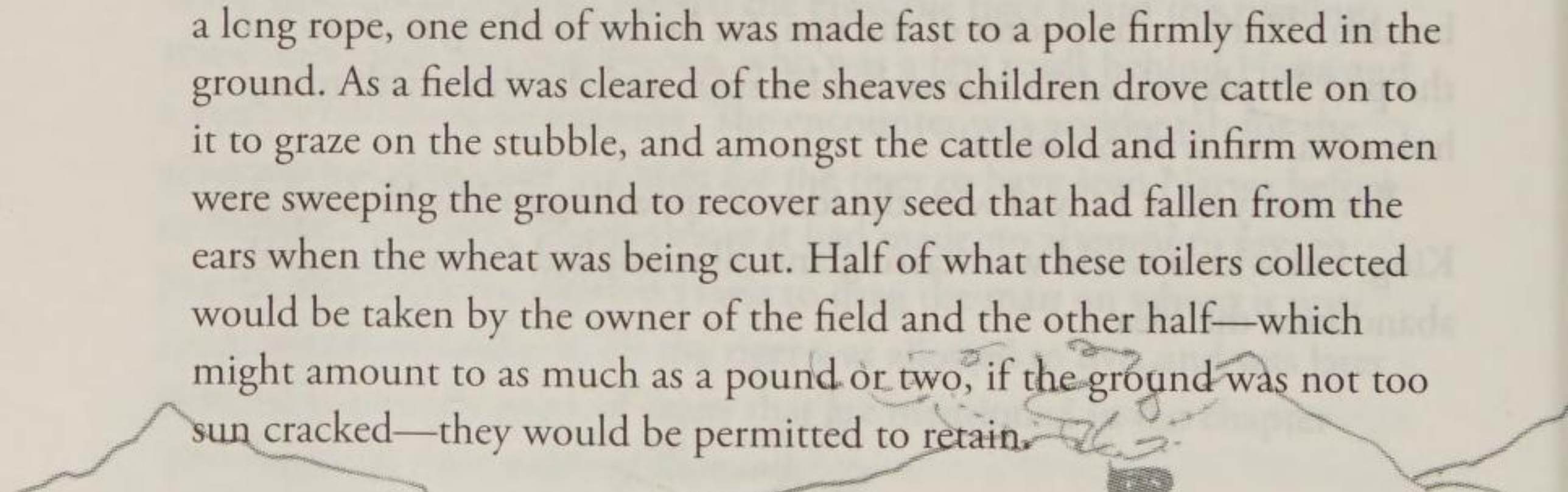
For many days I toyed with the idea of appealing to His Majesty the King, but with a world war starting and all it implied I very reluctantly abandoned the idea.

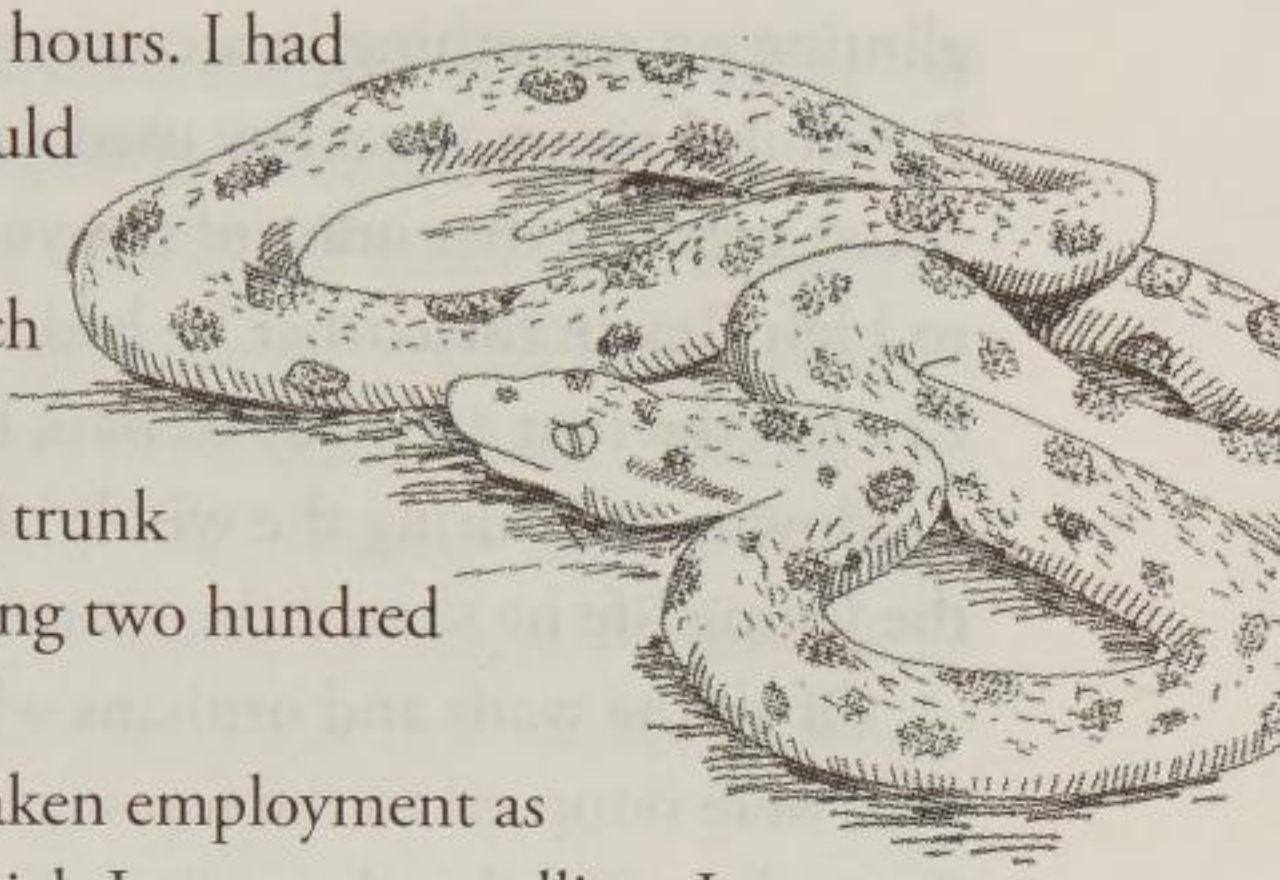
Loyalty

The mail train was running at its maximum speed of thirty miles per hour through country that was familiar. For mile upon mile the newly

risen sun had been shining on fields where people were reaping the golden wheat, for it was the month of April and the train was passing through the Gangetic valley, the most fertile land in India. During the previous year India had witnessed one of her worst famines. I had seen whole villages existing on the bark of trees; on minute grass seeds swept up with infinite labour from scorching plains; and on the wild plums that grow on waste lands too poor for the raising of crops. Mercifully the weather had changed, good winter rains had brought back fertility to the land, and the people who had starved for a year were now eagerly reaping a good harvest. Early though the hour was, the scene was one of intense activity in which every individual of the community had his, or her, allotted part. The reaping was being done by women, most of them landless labourers who move from area to area, as the crop ripens, and who for their labour—which starts at dawn and ends when there is no longer light to work by—receive one-twelfth to one-sixteenth of the crop they cut in the course of the day.

There were no hedges to obstruct the view, and from the carriage window no mechanical device of any kind was to be seen. The ploughing had been done by oxen, two to a plough; the reaping was being done by sickles with a curved blade eighteen inches long; the sheaves, tied with twisted stalks of wheat straw, were being carted to the threshing floor on ox-carts with wooden wheels; and on the threshing floor, plastered over with cow dung, oxen were treading out the corn; they were tied to a long rope, one end of which was made fast to a pole firmly fixed in the ground. As a field was cleared of the sheaves children drove cattle on to it to graze on the stubble, and amongst the cattle old and infirm women were sweeping the ground to recover any seed that had fallen from the ears when the wheat was being cut. Half of what these toilers collected would be taken by the owner of the field and the other half—which might amount to as much as a pound or two, if the ground was not too sun cracked—they would be permitted to retain.





My journey was to last for thirty-six hours. I had the carriage to myself, and the train would stop for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Every mile of the country through which the train was running was interesting; and yet I was not happy, for in the steel trunk under my seat was a string bag containing two hundred rupees which did not belong to me.

Eighteen months previously I had taken employment as a Fuel Inspector with the railway on which I was now travelling. I had gone straight from school to this job, and for those eighteen months I had lived in the forest cutting five hundred thousand cubic feet of timber, to be used as fuel in locomotives. After the trees had been felled and billeted, each billet not more and not less than thirty-six inches long, the fuel was carted ten miles to the nearest point of the railway, where it was stacked and measured and then loaded into fuel trains and taken to the stations where it was needed. Those eighteen months alone in the forest had been strenuous, but I had kept fit and enjoyed the work. There was plenty of game in the forest in the way of *chital*, four-horned antelope, pig, and pea fowl, and in the river that formed one boundary of the forest there were several varieties of fish and many alligators and pythons. My work did not permit of my indulging in sport during daylight hours so I had to do all my shooting for the pot, and fishing, at night. Shooting by moonlight is very different from shooting in daylight, for though it is easier to stalk a deer or a rooting pig at night it is difficult to shoot accurately unless the moon can be got to shine on the foresight. The pea fowl had to be shot while they were roosting, and I am not ashamed to say that I occasionally indulged in this form of murder, for the only meat I ate during that year and a half was what I shot on moonlight nights; during the dark period of the moon I had perforce to be a vegetarian.

The felling of the forest disarranged the normal life of the jungle folk and left me with the care of many waifs and orphans, all of whom had to share my small tent with me. It was when I was a bit crowded with two broods of partridges—one black and the other grey, four pea fowl chicks, two leverets, and two baby four-horned antelope that could only just stand upright on their spindle legs, that Rex the python took up his quarters in the tent. I returned an hour after nightfall that day, and while I was feeding the four-footed inmates with milk I saw the lantern light

glinting on something in a corner of the tent and on investigation found Rex coiled up on the straw used as a bed by the baby antelope. A hurried count revealed that none of the young inmates of the tent were missing, so I left Rex in the corner he had selected. For two months thereafter Rex left the tent each day to bask in the sun, returning to his corner at sundown, and during the whole of that period he never harmed any of the young life he shared the tent with.

Of all the waifs and orphans who were brought up in the tent, and who were returned to the forest as soon as they were able to fend for themselves, Tiddley-de-winks, a four-horned antelope, was the only one who refused to leave me. She followed me when I moved camp to be nearer to the railway line to supervise the loading of the fuel, and in doing so nearly lost her life. Having been brought up by hand she had no fear of human beings and the day after our move she approached a man who, thinking she was a wild animal, tried to kill her. When I returned to the tent that evening I found her lying near my camp bed and on picking her up saw that both her forelegs had been broken, and that the broken ends of the bones had worked through the skin. While I was getting a little milk down her throat, and trying to summon sufficient courage to do what I knew should be done, my servant came into the tent with a man who admitted to having tried to kill the poor beast. It appeared that this man had been working in his field when Tiddley-de-winks went up to him, and thinking she had strayed in from the nearby forest, he struck her with a stick and then chased her; and it was only when she entered my tent that he realized she was a tame animal. My servant had advised him to leave before I returned, but this the man had refused to do. When he had told his story he said he would return early next morning with a bone-setter from his village. There was nothing I could do for the injured animal, beyond making a soft bed for her and giving her milk at short intervals, and at daybreak next morning the man returned with the bone-setter.

It is unwise in India to judge from appearances. The bone-setter was a feeble old man, exhibiting in his person and tattered dress every sign of poverty, but he was none the less a specialist, and a man of few words. He asked me to lift up the injured animal, stood looking at her for a few minutes, and then turned and left the tent, saying over his shoulder that he would be back in two hours. I had worked week in week out for months on end so I considered I was justified in taking a morning off,

and before the old man returned I had cut a number of stakes in the nearby jungle and constructed a small pen in a corner of the tent. The man brought back with him a number of dry jute stalks from which the bark had been removed, a quantity of green paste, several young castor-oil plant leaves as big as plates, and a roll of thin jute twine. When I had seated myself on the edge of the camp bed with Tiddley-de-winks across my knees, her weight partly supported by her hind legs and partly by my knees, the old man sat down on the ground in front of her with his materials within reach.

The bones of both forelegs had been splintered midway between the knees and the tiny hooves, and the dangling portion of the legs had twisted round and round. Very gently the old man untwisted the legs, covered them from knee to hoof with a thick layer of green paste, laid strips of the castor-oil leaves over the paste to keep it in position, and over the leaves laid the jute stalks, binding them to the legs with jute twine. Next morning he returned with splints made of jute stalks strung together, and when they had been fitted to her legs Tiddley-de-winks was able to bend her knees and place her hooves, which extended an inch beyond the splints, on the ground.

The bone-setter's fee was one rupee, plus two annas for the ingredients he had put in the paste and the twine he had purchased in the bazaar, and not until the splints had been removed and the little antelope was able to skip about again would he accept either his fee or the little present I gratefully offered him.

My work, every day of which I had enjoyed, was over now and I was on my way to headquarters to render an account of the money I had spent and, I feared, to look for another job; for the locomotives had been converted to coal-burning and no more wood fuel would be needed. My books were all in perfect order and I had the feeling that I had rendered good service, for I had done in eighteen months what had been estimated to take two years. Yet I was uneasy, and the reason for my being so was the bag of money in my steel trunk.

I reached my destination, Samastipur, at 9 a.m. and after depositing my luggage in the waiting-room set out for the office of the head of the department I had been working for, with my account books and the bag containing the two hundred rupees. At the office I was told by a very imposing doorkeeper that the master was engaged, and that I would have to wait. It was hot in the open veranda, and as the minutes

dragged by my nervousness increased, for an old railway hand who had helped me to make up my books had warned me that to submit balanced accounts and then admit, as I had every intention of doing, that I had two hundred rupees in excess would land me in very great trouble. Eventually the door opened and a very harassed-looking man emerged; and before the doorkeeper could close it, a voice from inside the room bellowed at me to come in. Ryles, the head of the Locomotive Department of the Bengal and North Western Railway, was a man weighing sixteen stone, with a voice that struck terror into all who served under him, and with a heart of gold. Bidding me sit down he drew my books towards him, summoned a clerk and very carefully checked my figures with those received from the stations to which the fuel had been sent. Then he told me he regretted my services would no longer be needed, said that discharge orders would be sent to me later in the day, and indicated that the interview was over. Having picked my hat off the floor I started to leave, but was called back and told I had forgotten to remove what appeared to be a bag of money that I had placed on the table. It was foolish of me to have thought I could just leave the two hundred rupees and walk away, but that was what I was trying to do when Ryles called me; so I went back to the table and told him that the money belonged to the Railway, and as I did not know how to account for it in my books, I had brought it to him. 'Your books are balanced', Ryles said, 'and if you have not faked your accounts I should like an explanation.' Tewari, the head clerk, had come into the room with a tray of papers and he stood behind Ryles's chair, with encouragement in his kindly old eyes, as I gave Ryles the following explanation.

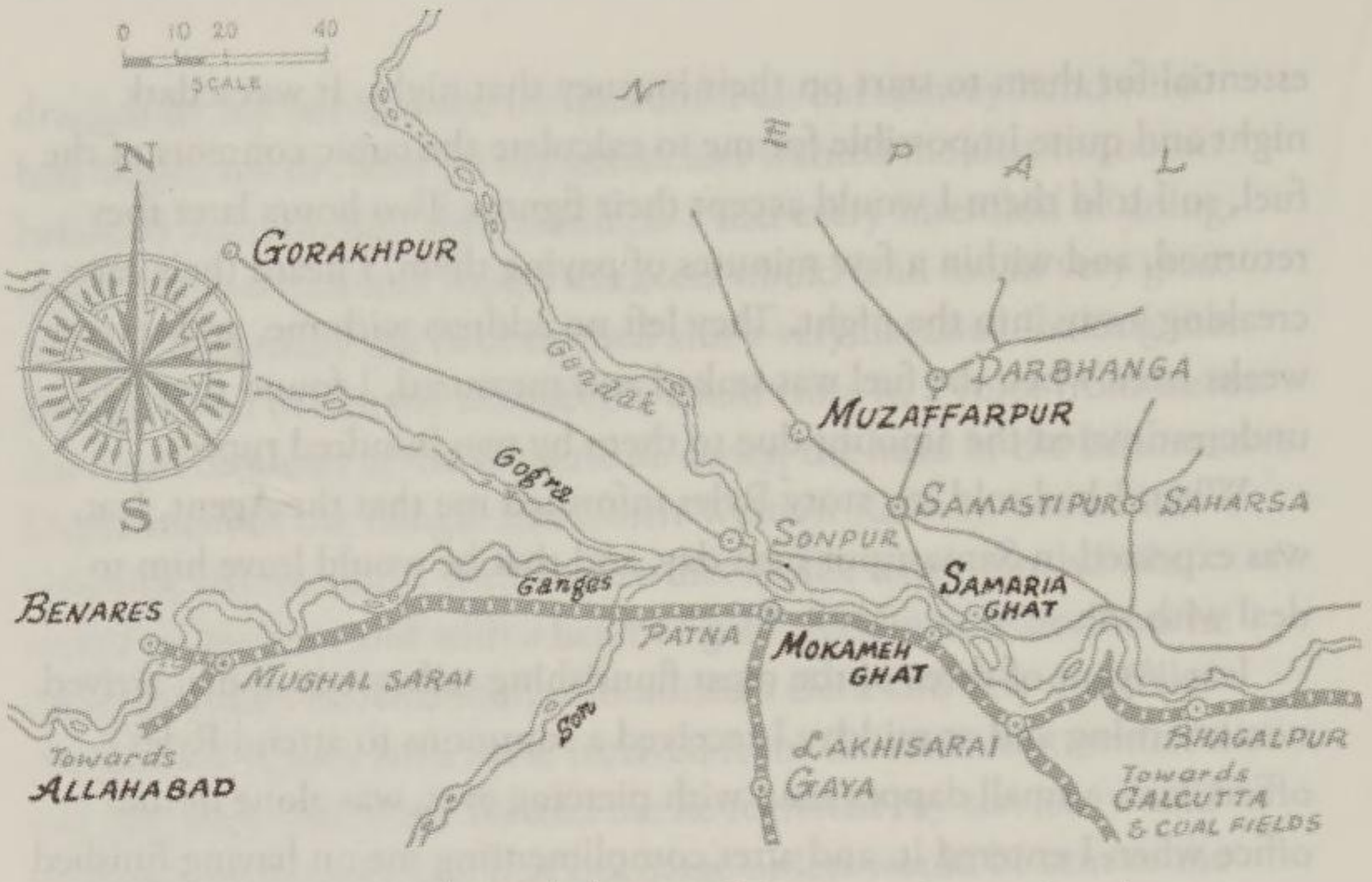
When my work was nearing completion, fifteen cartmen, who had been engaged to cart fuel from the forest to the railway line, came to me one night and stated they had received an urgent summons to return to their village, to harvest the crops. The fuel they had carted was scattered over a wide area, and as it would take several days to stack and measure it they wanted me to make a rough calculation of the amount due to them, as it was

essential for them to start on their journey that night. It was a dark night and quite impossible for me to calculate the cubic contents of the fuel, so I told them I would accept their figures. Two hours later they returned, and within a few minutes of paying them, I heard their carts creaking away into the night. They left no address with me, and several weeks later, when the fuel was staked and measured, I found they had underestimated the amount due to them by two hundred rupees.

When I had told my story Ryles informed me that the Agent, Izat, was expected in Samastipur next day, and that he would leave him to deal with me.

Izat, Agent of three of the most flourishing railways in India, arrived next morning and at midday I received a summons to attend Ryles' office. Izat, a small dapper man with piercing eyes, was alone in the office when I entered it, and after complimenting me on having finished my job six months ahead of time, he said Ryles had shown him my books and given him a report and that he wanted to ask one question! Why had I not pocketed the two hundred rupees, and said nothing about it? My answer to this question was evidently satisfactory, for that evening, while waiting at the station in a state of uncertainty, I received two letters, one from Tewari thanking me for my contribution of two hundred rupees to the Railwaymen's Widows' and Orphans' Fund, of which he was Honorary Secretary, and the other from Izat informing me that my services were being retained, and instructing me to report to Ryles for duty.

For a year thereafter I worked up and down the railway on a variety of jobs, at times on the footplates of locomotives reporting on consumption of coal—a job I liked for I was permitted to drive the engines; at times as guard of goods trains, a tedious job, for the railway was short-handed and on many occasions I was on duty for forty-eight hours at a stretch; and at times as assistant storekeeper, or assistant station-master. And then one day I received orders to go to Mokameh Ghat and see Storrar, the Ferry Superintendent. The Bengal and North Western Railway runs through the Gangetic valley at varying distances from the Ganges river, and at several places branch lines take off from the main line and run down to the river and, by means of ferries, connect up with the broad-gauge railways on the right bank. Mokameh Ghat on the right bank of the Ganges is the most important of these connexions.



I left Samastipur in the early hours of the morning and at the branch-line terminus, Samaria Ghat, boarded the S.S. *Gorakhpur*. Storrar had been apprised of my visit but no reason had been given, and as I had not been told why I was to go to Mokameh Ghat, we spent the day partly in his house and partly in walking about the extensive sheds, in which there appeared to be a considerable congestion of goods. Two days later I was summoned to Gorakhpur, the headquarters of the railway, and informed that I had been posted to Mokameh Ghat as Trans-shipment Inspector, that my pay had been increased from one hundred to one hundred and fifty rupees per month, and that I was to take over the contract for handling goods a week later.

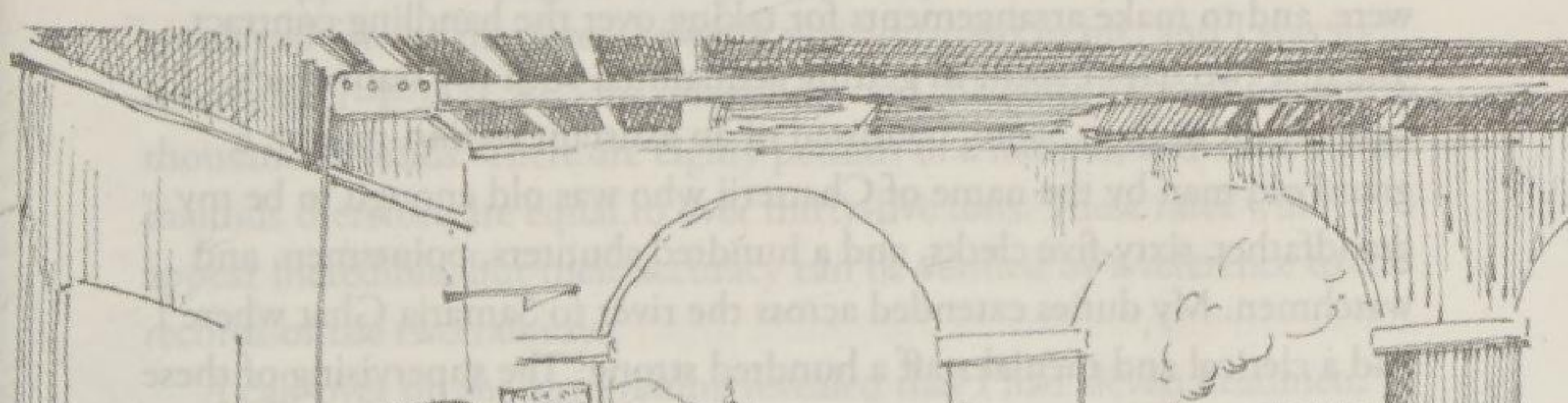
So back to Mokameh Ghat I went, arriving on this occasion at night, to take up a job about which I knew nothing, and to take on a contract without knowing where to get a single labourer, and, most important of all, with a capital of only one hundred and fifty rupees, saved during my two and a half years' service.

Storrar was not expecting me on this occasion, but he gave me dinner, and when I told him why I had returned we took our chairs on to the veranda, where a cool wind was blowing off the river, and talked late into the night. Storrar was twice my age and had been at Mokameh Ghat for several years. He was employed as Ferry Superintendent by the Bengal and North Western (metre-gauge) Railway, and was in charge of a fleet of steamers and barges that ferried passengers and metre-gauge wagons between Samaria Ghat and Mokameh Ghat. I learnt from him

that eighty per cent of the long-distance traffic on the Bengal and North Western Railway passed through Mokameh Ghat; and that each year, from March to September, congestion of goods traffic took place at Mokameh Ghat and caused serious loss to the Railway.

The transfer of goods between the two railways at Mokameh Ghat, necessitated by a break of gauge, was done by a Labour Company which held the contract for handling goods throughout the length of the broad-gauge railway. In Storrar's opinion the indifference of this company to the interests of the metre-gauge railway, and the seasonal shortage of labour due to the harvesting of crops in the Gangetic valley, were the causes of the annual congestion. Having imparted this information, he very pertinently asked how I, a total stranger to the locality and without any capital—he brushed aside my hard-earned savings—proposed to accomplish what the Labour Company with all their resources had failed to do. The sheds at Mokameh Ghat, he added, were stacked to the roof with goods, there were four hundred wagons in the yard waiting to be unloaded, and a thousand wagons on the far side of the river waiting to be ferried across. 'My advice to you', he concluded, 'is to catch the early steamer to Samaria Ghat and go straight back to Gorakhpur. Tell the Railway you will have nothing to do with the handling contract.'

I was up early next morning but I did not catch the steamer to Samaria Ghat. Instead, I went on a tour of inspection of the sheds and of the goods yard. Storrar had not overpainted the picture: in fact the



conditions were even worse than he had said they were, for in addition to the four hundred metre-gauge wagons there were the same number of broad-gauge wagons waiting to be unloaded. At a rough calculation I put the goods at Mokameh Ghat waiting to be dealt with at fifteen thousand tons, and I had been sent to clear up the mess. Well, I was not quite twenty-one years of age, and summer was starting, a season when all of us are a little bit mad. By the time I met Ram Saran I had made up my mind that I would take on the job, no matter what the result might be.

Ram Saran was station-master at Mokameh Ghat, a post he had held for two years. He was twenty years older than I was, had an enormous jet black beard, and was the father of five children. He had been advised by telegram of my arrival, but had not been told that I was to take over the handling contract. When I gave him this bit of news his face beamed all over and he said, 'Good, Sir. Very good. We will manage.' My heart warmed towards Ram Saran on hearing that 'we', and up to his death, thirty-five years later, it never cooled.

When I told Storrar over breakfast that morning that I had decided to take on the handling contract he remarked that fools never took good advice, but added that he would do all he could to help me, a promise he faithfully kept. In the months that followed he kept his ferry running day and night to keep me supplied with wagons.

The journey from Gorakhpur had taken two days, so when I arrived at Mokameh Ghat I had five days in which to learn what my duties were, and to make arrangements for taking over the handling contract. The first two days I spent in getting acquainted with my staff which, in addition to Ram Saran, consisted of an assistant station-master, a grand old man by the name of Chatterji who was old enough to be my grandfather, sixty-five clerks, and a hundred shunters, pointsmen, and watchmen. My duties extended across the river to Samaria Ghat where I had a clerical and menial staff a hundred strong. The supervising of these two staffs, and the care of the goods in transit, was in itself a terrifying job and added to it was the responsibility of providing a labour force sufficient to keep the five hundred thousand tons of goods that passed through Mokameh Ghat annually flowing smoothly.

The men employed by the big Labour Company were on piece work, and as all work at Mokameh Ghat was practically at a standstill, there were several hundred very discontented men sitting about the

sheds, many of whom offered me their services when they heard that I was going to do the handling for the metre-gauge railway. I was under no agreement not to employ the Labour Company's men, but thought it prudent not to do so. However, I saw no reason why I should not employ their relatives, so on the first of the three days I had in hand I selected twelve men and appointed them headmen. Eleven of these headmen undertook to provide ten men each, to start with, for the handling of goods, and the twelfth undertook to provide a mixed gang of sixty men and women for the handling of coal. The traffic to be dealt with consisted of a variety of commodities, and this meant employing different castes to deal with the different classes of goods. So of the twelve headmen, eight were Hindus, two Mohammedans, and two men of the depressed class; and as only one of the twelve was literate I employed one Hindu and one Mohammedan clerk to keep their accounts.

While one Labour Company was doing the work of both railways the interchange of goods had taken place from wagon to wagon. Now each railway was to unload its goods in the sheds, and reload from shed to wagon. For all classes of goods, excluding heavy machinery and coal, I was to be paid at the rate of Re 1-7-0 (equivalent to 1*s.* 11*d.* at the rate of exchange then current) for every thousand maunds of goods unloaded from wagons to shed or loaded from shed to wagons. Heavy machinery and coal were one-way traffic and as these two commodities were to be trans-shipped from wagon to wagon and only one contractor could be employed for the purpose, the work was entrusted to me, and I was to receive Re 1-4-0 (1*s.* 8*d.*) for unloading, and the same for loading, one thousand maunds. There are eighty pounds in a maund, and a thousand maunds therefore are equal to over thirty-five tons. These rates will appear incredible, but their accuracy can be verified by a reference to the records of the two railways.

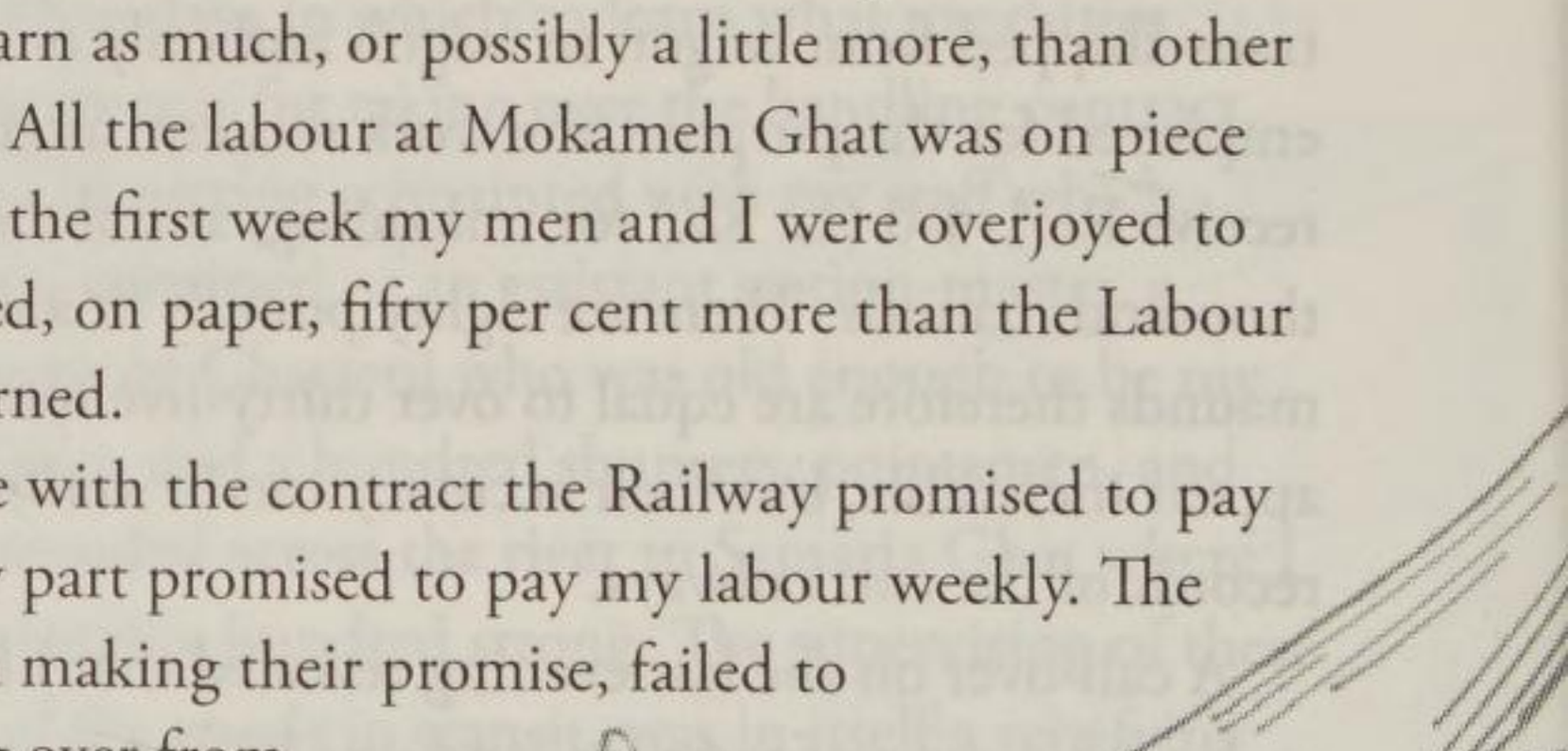
A call-over on the last evening revealed that I had eleven headmen, each with a gang of ten men, and one headman with a mixed gang of sixty men and women. This, together with the two clerks, completed my force. At day-break next morning I telegraphed to Gorakhpur that I had assumed my duties as Trans-shipment Inspector, and had taken over the handling contract.

Ram Saran's opposite number on the broad-gauge railway was an Irishman by the name of Tom Kelly. Kelly had been at Mokameh Ghat

for some years and though he was very pessimistic of my success, he very sportingly offered to help me in every way he could. With the sheds congested with goods, and with four hundred wagons of each railway waiting to be unloaded, it was necessary to do something drastic to make room in the sheds and get the traffic moving, so I arranged with Kelly that I would take the risk of unloading a thousand tons of wheat on the ground outside the sheds and with the wagons so released clear a space in the sheds for Kelly to unload a thousand tons of salt and sugar. Kelly then with his empty wagons would clear a space in sheds for me. This plan worked admirably. Fortunately for me it did not rain while my thousand tons of wheat were exposed to the weather, and in ten days we had not only cleared the accumulation in the sheds but also the accumulation of wagons. Kelly and I were then able to advise our respective headquarters to resume the booking of goods via Mokameh Ghat, which had been suspended for a fortnight.

I took over the contract at the beginning of the summer, the season when traffic on Indian railways is at its heaviest, and as soon as booking was opened a steady stream of downwards traffic from the Bengal and North Western Railway and an equally heavy stream from the broad-gauge railway started pouring into Mokameh Ghat. The rates on which I had been given the contract were the lowest paid to any contractor in India, and the only way in which I could hope to keep my labour was by cutting it down to the absolute minimum and making it work harder in order that it would earn as much, or possibly a little more, than other labour on similar work. All the labour at Mokameh Ghat was on piece work, and at the end of the first week my men and I were overjoyed to find that they had earned, on paper, fifty per cent more than the Labour Company's men had earned.

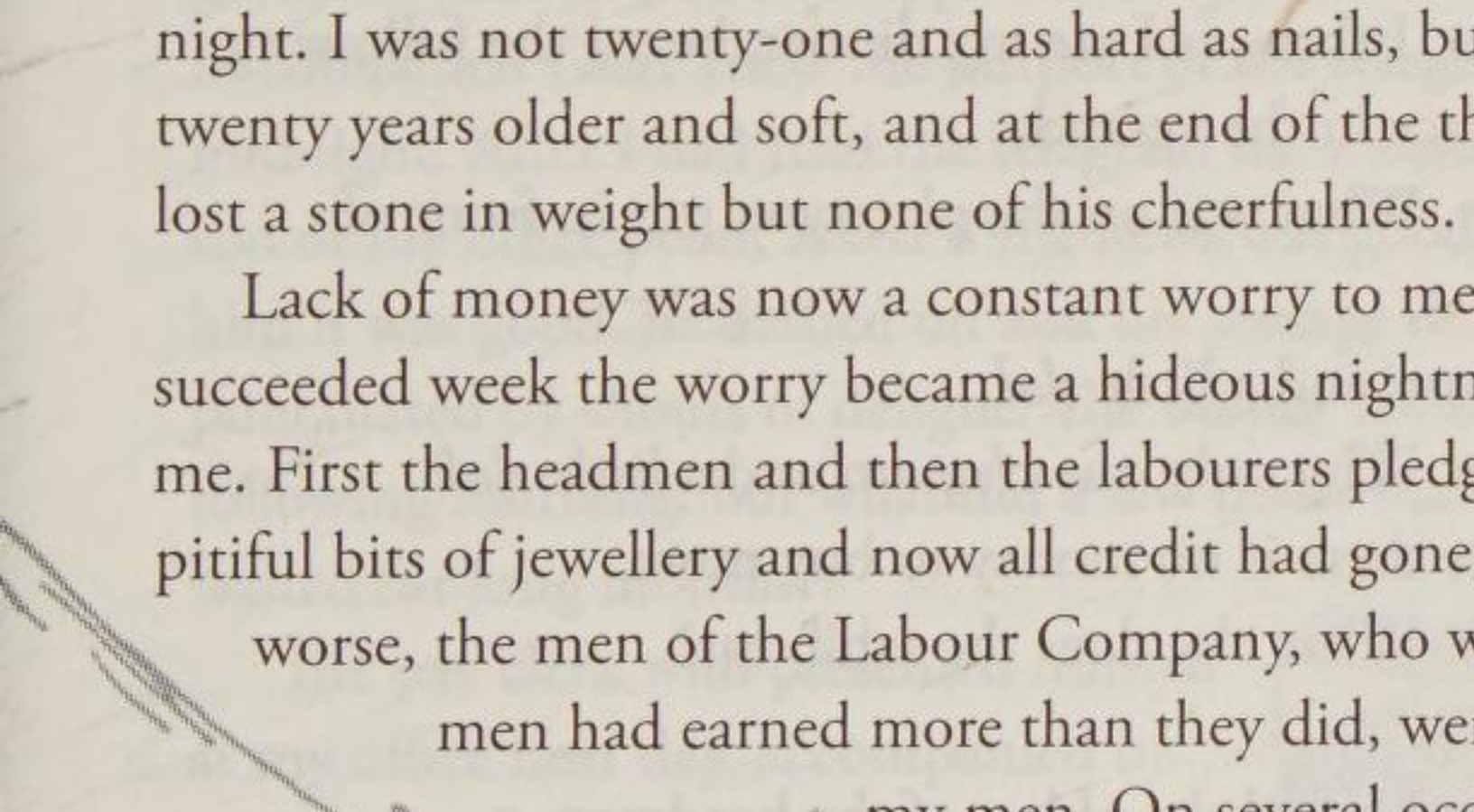
When entrusting me with the contract the Railway promised to pay me weekly, and I on my part promised to pay my labour weekly. The Railway, however, when making their promise, failed to realize that by switching over from one handling contractor to another they would be raising complications for their Audit Department that would take time to resolve. For the

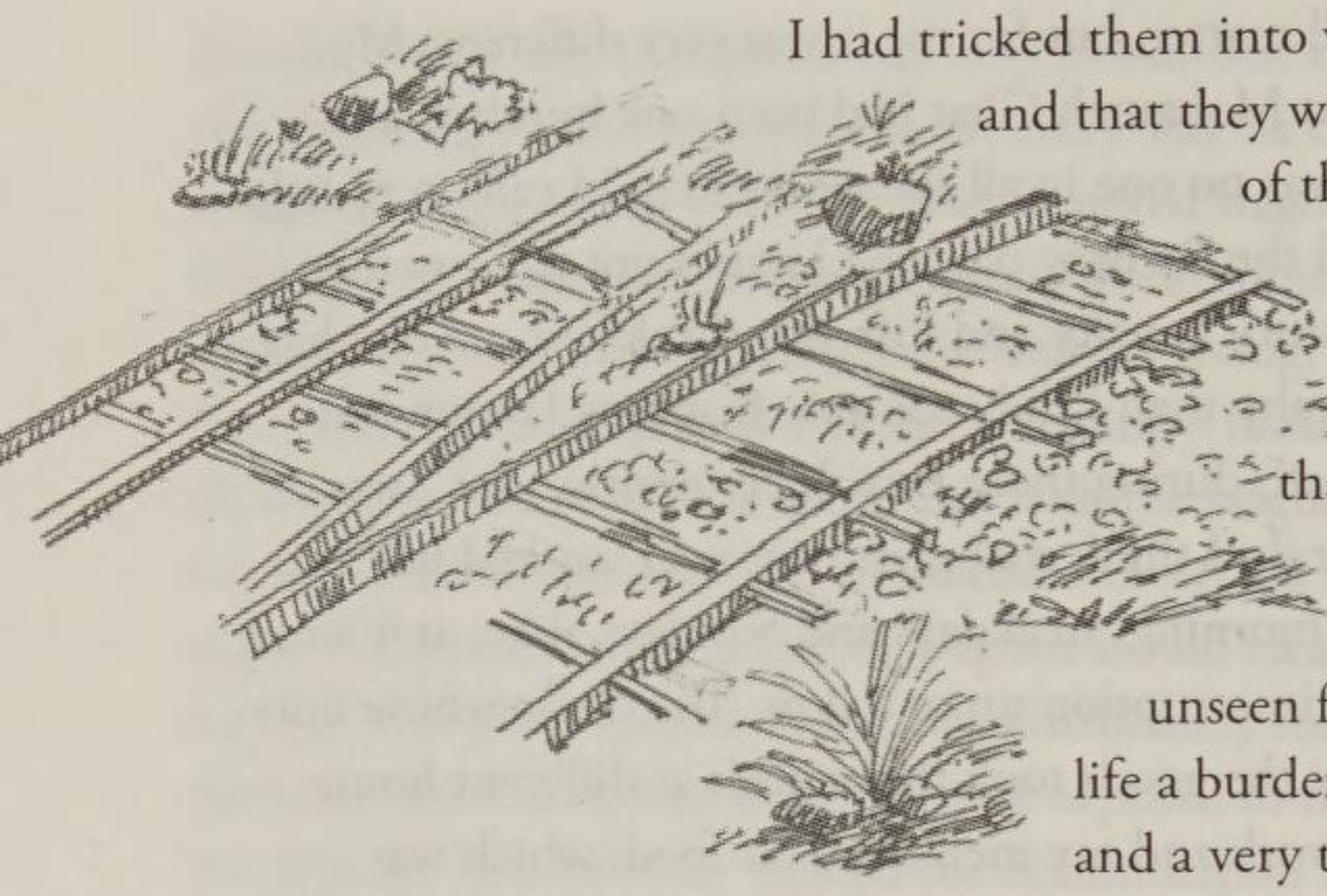


Railway this was a small matter, but for me it was very different. My total capital on arrival at Mokameh Ghat had been one hundred and fifty rupees, and there was no one in all the world I could call on to help me with a loan, so until the Railway paid me I could not pay my men.

I have entitled this story Loyalty and I do not think that anyone has ever received greater loyalty than I did, not only from my labour, but also from the railway staff, during those first three months that I was at Mokameh Ghat. Nor do I think that men have ever worked harder. The work started every morning, weekdays and Sundays alike, at 4 a.m., and continued without interruption up to 8 p.m. The clerks whose duty it was to check and tally the goods took their meals at different hours to avoid a stoppage of work and my men ate their food, which was brought to them by wives, mothers, or daughters, in the sheds. There were no trade unions or slaves and slave-drivers in those days and every individual was at liberty to work as many, or as few, hours as he or she wished to. And everyone worked cheerfully and happily; for no matter whether it was the procuring of more and better food and clothing for the family, the buying of a new ox to replace a worn-out one, or the paying-off of a debt, the incentive, without which no man can work his best, was there. My work and Ram Saran's did not end when the men knocked off work, for there was correspondence to attend to, and the next day's work to be planned and arranged for, and during those first three months neither of us spent more than four hours in bed each night. I was not twenty-one and as hard as nails, but Ram Saran was twenty years older and soft, and at the end of the three months he had lost a stone in weight but none of his cheerfulness.

Lack of money was now a constant worry to me, and as week succeeded week the worry became a hideous nightmare that never left me. First the headmen and then the labourers pledged their cheap and pitiful bits of jewellery and now all credit had gone; and to make matters worse, the men of the Labour Company, who were jealous that my men had earned more than they did, were beginning to taunt my men. On several occasions ugly incidents were narrowly avoided, for semi-starvation had not impaired the loyalty of my men and they were willing to give battle to anyone who as much as hinted that





I had tricked them into working for me, and that they would never see a pice of the money they had earned.

The monsoon was late in coming that year and the red ball in the sky, fanned by a wind from an unseen furnace, was making life a burden. At the end of a long and a very trying day I received a telegram from Samaria Ghat informing me that an engine had been derailed on the slipway that fed the barges on which wagons were ferried across to Mokameh Ghat. A launch conveyed me across the river and twice within the next three hours the engine was replaced on the track, with the aid of hand jacks, only to be derailed again. It was not until the wind had died down and the powdery sand could be packed under the wooden sleepers that the engine was re-railed for the third time, and the slipway again brought into use. Tired and worn out, and with eyes swollen and sore from the wind and sand, I had just sat down to my first meal that day when my twelve headmen filed into the room, and seeing my servant placing a plate in front of me, with the innate courtesy of Indians, filed out again. I then, as I ate my dinner, heard the following conversation taking place in the veranda.

One of the headmen. What was on the plate you put in front of the sahib?

My servant. A *chapatti* and a little *dal.*

One of the headmen. Why only one *chapatti* and a little *dal*?

My servant. Because there is no money to buy more.

One of the headmen. What else does the sahib eat?

My servant. Nothing.

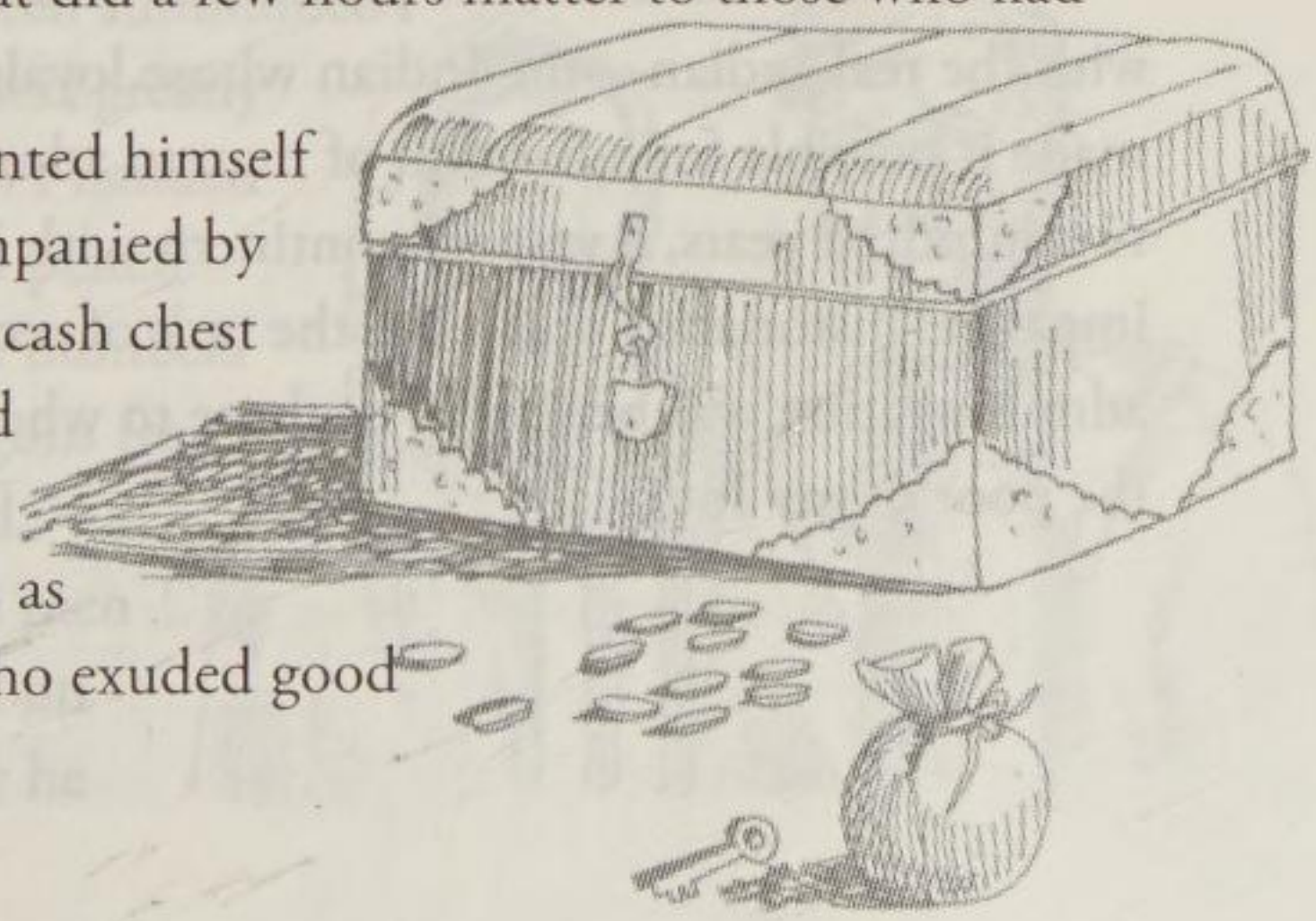
After a short silence I heard the oldest of the headmen, a Mohammedan with a great beard dyed with henna, say to his companions, 'Go home. I will stay and speak to the sahib.'

When my servant had removed the empty plate the old headman requested permission to enter the room, and standing before me spoke

as follows: 'We came to tell you that our stomachs have long been empty and that after tomorrow it would be no longer possible for us to work. But we have seen tonight that your case is as bad as ours and we will carry on as long as we have strength to stand. I will, with your permission, go now, sahib, and, for the sake of Allah, I beg you will do something to help us.'

Every day for weeks I had been appealing to headquarters at Gorakhpur for funds and the only reply I could elicit was that steps were being taken to make early payment of my bills.

After the bearded headman left me that night I walked across to the Telegraph Office, where the telegraphist on duty was sending the report I submitted each night of the work done during the day, took a form off his table and told him to clear the line for an urgent message to Gorakhpur. It was then a few minutes after midnight and the message I sent read: 'Work at Mokameh Ghat ceases at midday today unless I am assured that twelve thousand rupees has been dispatched by morning train.' The telegraphist read the message over and looking up at me said: 'If I have your permission I will tell my brother, who is on duty at this hour, to deliver the message at once and not wait until office hours in the morning.' Ten hours later, and with two hours of my ultimatum still to run, I saw a telegraph messenger hurrying towards me with a buff-coloured envelope in his hand. Each group of men he passed stopped work to stare after him, for everyone in Mokameh Ghat knew the purport of the telegram I had sent at midnight. After I had read the telegram the messenger, who was the son of my office peon, asked if the news was good; and when I told him it was good, he dashed off and his passage down the sheds was punctuated by shouts of delight. The money could not arrive until the following morning, but what did a few hours matter to those who had waited for long months?



The pay clerk who presented himself at my office next day, accompanied by some of my men carrying a cash chest slung on a bamboo pole and guarded by two policemen, was a jovial Hindu who was as broad as he was long and who exuded good

humour and sweat in equal proportions. I never saw him without a pair of spectacles tied across his forehead with red tape. Having settled himself on the floor of my office he drew on a cord tied round his neck and from somewhere deep down in his person pulled up a key. He opened the cash chest, and lifted out twelve string-bags each containing one thousand freshly minted silver rupees. He licked a stamp, and stuck it to the receipt I had signed. Then, delving into a pocket that would comfortably have housed two rabbits, he produced an envelope containing bank notes to the value of four hundred and fifty rupees, my arrears of pay for three months.

I do not think anyone has ever had as great pleasure in paying out money as I had when I placed a bag containing a thousand rupees into the hands of each of the twelve headmen, nor do I think men have ever received money with greater pleasure than they did. The advent of the fat pay clerk had relieved a tension that had become almost unbearable, and the occasion called for some form of celebration, so the remainder of the day was declared a holiday—the first my men and I had indulged in for ninety-five days. I do not know how the others spent their hours of relaxation. For myself, I am not ashamed to admit that I spent mine in sound and restful sleep.

For twenty-one years my men and I worked the handling contract at Mokameh Ghat, and during the whole of that long period, and even when I was absent in France and in Waziristan during the 1914–18 war, the traffic flowed smoothly through the main outlet of the Bengal and North Western Railway with never a hitch. When we took over the contract, between four and five hundred thousand tons of goods were passing through Mokameh Ghat, and when I handed over to Ram Saran the traffic had increased to a million tons.

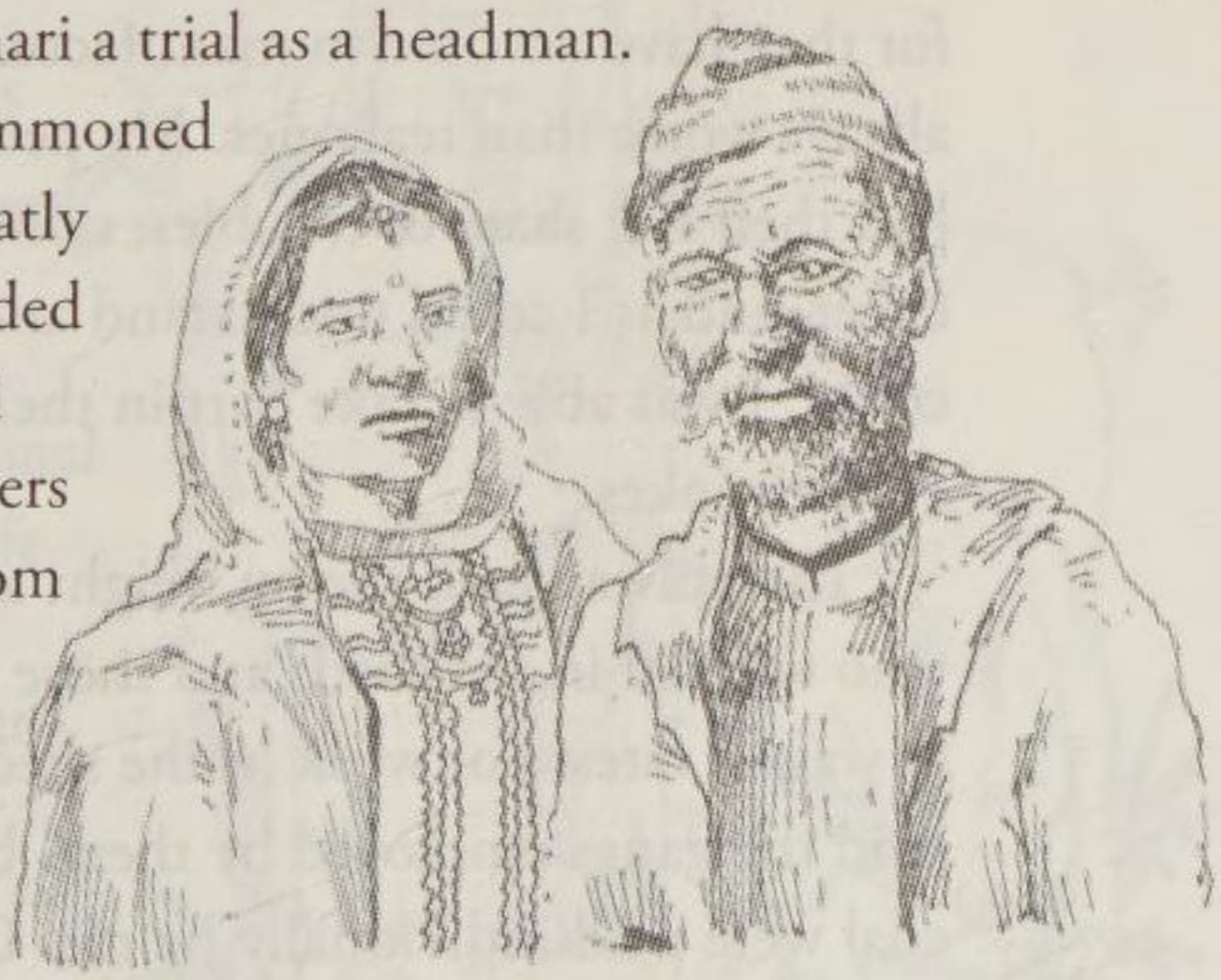
Those who visit India for pleasure or profit never come in contact with the real Indian—the Indian whose loyalty and devotion alone made it possible for a handful of men to administer, for close on two hundred years, a vast subcontinent with its teeming millions. To impartial historians I will leave the task of recording whether or not that administration was beneficial to those to whom I have introduced you, the poor of my India.

Chamari

Chamari, as his name implies, belonged to the lowest strata of India's sixty million Untouchables. Accompanied by his wife, an angular person whose face was stamped with years of suffering and whose two young children were clutching her torn skirts, he applied to me for work. Chamari was an undersized man with a poor physique, and as he was not strong enough to work in the sheds I put him and his wife on to trans-shipping coal. Next morning I provided the pair of them with shovels and baskets, and they started work with courage and industry far beyond their strength. Towards evening I had to put others on to finishing their task, for the delay in unloading one of a rake of fifty wagons meant hanging up the work of several hundred labourers.

For two days Chamari and his wife laboured valiantly but ineffectively. On the third morning when, their blistered hands tied up in dirty rags, they were waiting for work to be allotted to them I asked Chamari if he could read and write. When he said that he knew a little Hindi, I instructed him to return the shovels and baskets to the store and to come to my office for orders. A few days previously I had discharged the headman of the coal gang for his inability to keep sober—the only man I ever discharged—and as it was quite evident that neither Chamari nor his wife would be able to make a living at the job they were on, I decided to give Chamari a trial as a headman.

Chamari thought he had been summoned to the office to be sacked and was greatly relieved, and very proud, when I handed him a new account book and a pencil and told him to take down the numbers of the rake of broad-gauge wagons from which coal was being unloaded, together with the names of the men and women who were engaged on each wagon. Half an hour later he



returned with the information I had asked for, neatly entered in the book. When I had verified the correctness of these entries I handed the book back to Chamari, told him I had appointed him headman of the coal gang, at that time numbering two hundred men and women, and explained his duties to him in detail. A humble man who one short hour earlier had laboured under all the disqualifications of his lowly birth walked out of my office with a book tucked under his arm, a pencil behind his ear and, for the first time in his life, his head in the air.

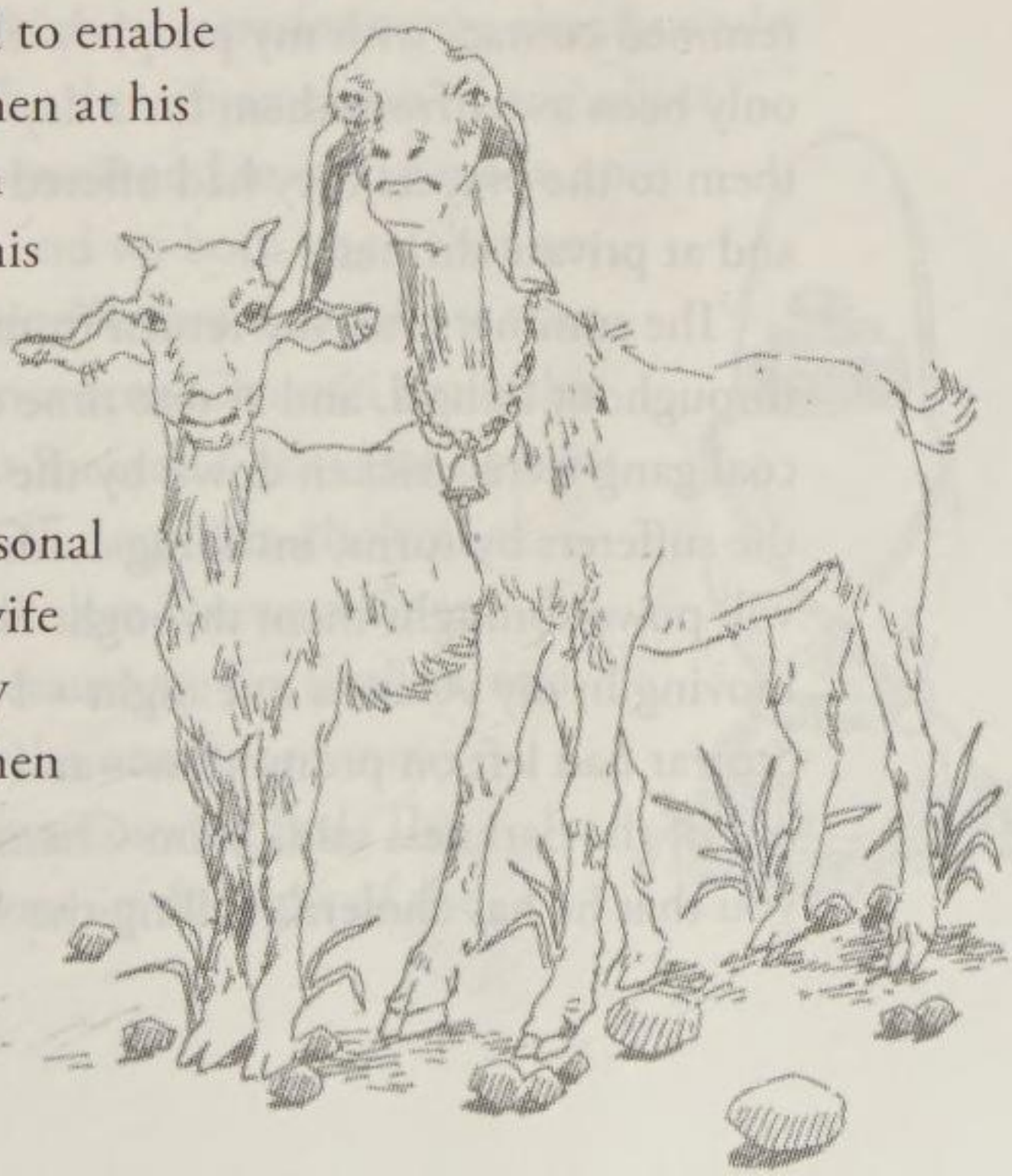
Chamari was one of the most conscientious and hard-working men I have ever employed. In the gang he commanded there were men and women of all castes including Brahmins, Chattris, and Thakurs, and never once did he offend by rendering less respect to these high-caste men and women than was theirs by birthright, and never once was his authority questioned. He was responsible for keeping the individual accounts of everyone working under him, and during the twenty years he worked for me the correctness of his accounts was never disputed.

On Sunday evenings Chamari and I would sit, he on a mat and I on a stool, with a great pile of copper pice between us, and ringed round by coal-grimed men and women eagerly waiting for their week's wages. I enjoyed those Sunday evenings as much as did the simple hard-working people sitting round me, for my pleasure in giving them the wages they had earned with the sweat of their brows was as great as theirs in receiving them. During the week they worked on a platform half a mile long, and as some of them lived in the quarters I had built for them, while others lived in the surrounding villages, they had little opportunity for social intercourse. Sunday evenings gave them this opportunity, and they took full advantage of it. Hard-working people are always cheerful, for they have no time to manufacture imaginary troubles, which are always worse than real ones. My people were admittedly poor, and they had their full share of troubles; none the less they were full of good cheer, and as I could understand and speak their language as well as they could, I was able to take part in their light-hearted banter and appreciate all their jokes.

The railway paid me by weight and I paid my people, both those who worked in the sheds and those who worked on the coal platform, at wagon rates. For work in the sheds I paid the headmen, who in turn paid the gangs employed by them, but the men and women working on coal were paid individually by me. Chamari would change the currency

notes I gave him for pice in the Mokameh bazaar, and then, on Sunday evenings, as we sat with the pile of pice between us he would read out the names of the men and women who had been engaged on unloading every individual wagon during the week, while I made a quick mental calculation and paid the amount due to each worker. I paid forty pice (ten annas) for the unloading of each wagon, and when the pice would not divide up equally among the number that had been engaged on unloading any particular wagon I gave the extra pice to one of their number, who would later purchase salt to be divided among them. This system of payment worked to the satisfaction of everyone, and though the work was hard, and the hours long, the wage earned was three times as much as could be earned on the field work, and further, my work was permanent while field work was seasonal and temporary.

I started Chamari on a salary of fifteen rupees a month and gradually increased it to forty rupees, which was more than the majority of the clerks employed by the railway were getting, and in addition I allowed him to employ a gang of ten men to work in the sheds. In India a man's worth is assessed, to a great extent, by the money he is earning and the use he makes of it. Chamari was held in great respect by all sections of the community for the good wages he was earning, but he was held in even greater respect for the unobtrusive use he made of his money. Having known hunger he made it his business to see that no one whom he could succour suffered as he had suffered. All of his own lowly caste who passed his door were welcome to share his food, and those whose caste prohibited them from eating the food cooked by his wife were provided with material to enable them to prepare their own food. When at his wife's request I spoke to Chamari on the subject of keeping open house, his answer invariably was that he and his family had found the fifteen rupees per month, on which I had engaged him, sufficient for their personal requirements and that to allow his wife more than that sum now would only encourage her to be extravagant. When I asked what form her extravagance was likely to take he said she was



always nagging him about his clothes and telling him he should be better dressed than the men who were working under him, whereas he thought money spent on clothes could be better spent on feeding the poor. Then to clinch the argument he said; 'Look at yourself, Maharaj,'—he had addressed me thus from the first day, and continued so to address me to the end—'you have been wearing that suit for years, and if you can do that, why can't I?' As a matter of fact he was wrong about the suit, for I had two of the same material, one being cleaned of coal dust while the other was in use.

I had been at Mokameh Ghat sixteen years when Kaiser Wilhelm started his war. The railway opposed my joining up but gave their consent when I agreed to retain the contract. It was impossible to explain the implications of the war to my people at the conference to which I summoned them. However, each and every one of them was willing to carry on during my absence, and it was entirely due to their loyalty and devotion that traffic through Mokameh Ghat flowed smoothly and without a single hitch during the years I was serving, first in France, and later in Waziristan. Ram Saran acted as Trans-shipment Inspector during my absence, and when I returned after four years I resumed contact with my people with the pleasant feeling that I had only been away from them for a day. My safe return was attributed by them to the prayers they had offered up for me in temple and mosque, and at private shrines.

The summer after my return from the war cholera was bad throughout Bengal, and at one time two women and a man of the coal gang were stricken down by the disease. Chamari and I nursed the sufferers by turns, instilling confidence into them, and by sheer will power brought them through. Shortly thereafter I heard someone moving in my veranda one night—I had the bungalow to myself, for Storrar had left on promotion—and on my asking who it was, a voice out of the darkness said, 'I am Chamari's wife. I have come to tell you that he has cholera'. Telling the woman to wait I hastily donned

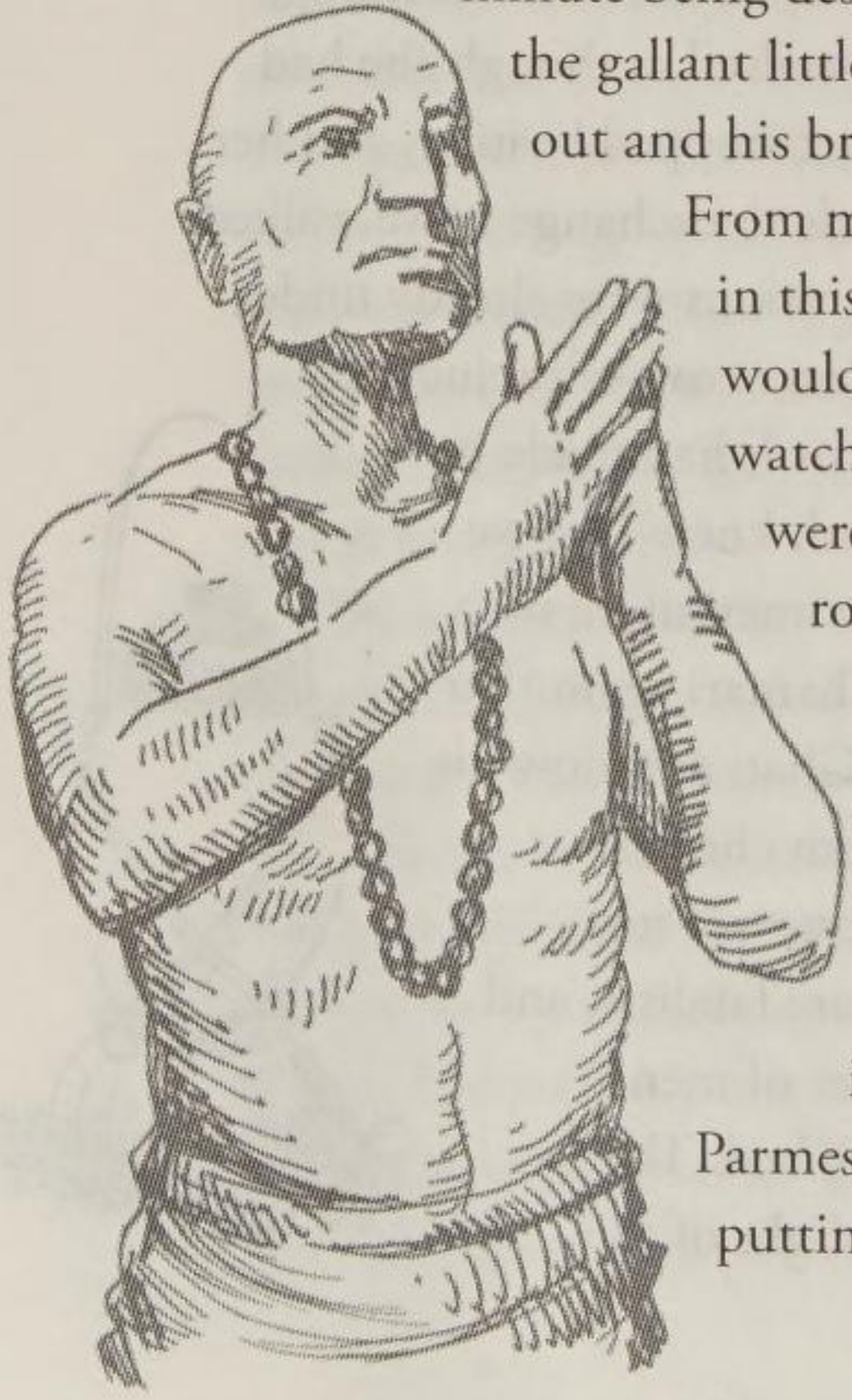
some clothes, lit a lantern, and set off with her armed with a stick, for Mokameh Ghat was infested with poisonous snakes.

Chamari had been at work all that day and in the afternoon had accompanied me to a nearby village in which a woman of his coal gang, by the name of Parbatti, was reported to be seriously ill. Parbatti, a widow with three children, was the first woman to volunteer to work for me when I arrived at Mokameh Ghat and for twenty years she had worked unflaggingly. Always cheerful and happy and willing to give a helping hand to any who needed it, she was the life and soul of the Sunday evening gatherings, for, being a widow, she could bandy words with all and sundry without offending India's very strict Mother Grundy. The boy who brought me the news that she was ill did not know what ailed her, but was convinced that she was dying, so I armed myself with a few simple remedies and calling for Chamari on the way hurried to the village. We found Parbatti lying on the floor of her hut with her head in her grey-haired mother's lap. It was the first case of tetanus I had ever seen, and I hope the last I shall ever see. Parbatti's teeth, which would have made the fortune of a film star, had been broken in an attempt to lever them apart, to give her water. She was conscious, but unable to speak, and the torments she was enduring are beyond any words of mine to describe. There was nothing I could do to give her relief beyond massaging the tense muscles of her throat to try to ease her breathing, and while I was doing this, her body was convulsed as though she had received an electric shock. Mercifully her heart stopped beating, and her sufferings ended. Chamari and I had no words to exchange as we walked away from the humble home in which preparations were already under way for the cremation ceremany, for though an ocean of prejudices had lain between the high-caste woman and us it had made no difference to our affection for her, and we both knew that we would miss the cheerful hardworking little woman more than either of us cared to admit. I had not seen Chamari again that evening, for work had taken me to Samaria Ghat; and now his wife had come to tell me he was suffering from cholera.

We in India loathe and dread cholera but we are not frightened of infection, possibly because we are fatalists, and I was not surprised therefore to find a number of men squatting on the floor round Chamari's string bed. The room was dark, but he recognized me in the light of the

lantern I was carrying and said, 'Forgive the woman for having called you at this hour.'—it was 2 a.m.—'I ordered her not to disturb you until morning, and she disobeyed me.' Chamari had left me, apparently in good health, ten hours previously and I was shocked to see the change those few hours had made in his appearance. Always a thin, lightly built man, he appeared to have shrunk to half his size; his eyes had sunk deep into their sockets, and his voice was weak and little more than a whisper. It was oppressively hot in the room, so I covered his partly naked body with a sheet and made the men carry the bed out into the open courtyard. It was a public place for a man suffering from cholera to be in, but better a public place than a hot room in which there was not sufficient air for a man in his condition to breathe.

Chamari and I had fought many cases of cholera together and he knew, none better, the danger of panicking and the necessity for unbounded faith in the simple remedies at my command. Heroically he fought the foul disease, never losing hope and taking everything I offered him to combat the cholera and sustain his strength. Hot as it was, he was cold, and the only way I was able to maintain any heat in his body was by placing a brazier with hot embers under his bed, and getting helpers to rub powdered ginger into the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet. For forty-eight hours the battle lasted, every minute being desperately contested with death, and then the gallant little man fell into a coma, his pulse fading out and his breathing becoming hardly perceptible.



From midnight to a little after 4 a.m. he lay in this condition, and I knew that my friend would never rally. Hushed people who had watched with me during those long hours were either sitting on the ground or standing round when Chamari suddenly sat up and in an urgent and perfectly natural voice said, 'Maharaj, Maharaj! Where are you'? I was standing at the head of the bed, and when I leant forward and put my hand in his shoulder he caught it in both of his and said, 'Maharaj, Parmeshwar is calling me, and I must go'. Then, putting his hands together and bowing his

head, he said, 'Parmeshwar, I come'. He was dead when I laid him back on the bed.

Possibly a hundred people of all castes were present and heard Chamari's last words, and among them was a stranger, with sandalwood caste-marks on his forehead. When I laid the wasted frame down on the bed the stranger asked who the dead man was and, when told that he was Chamari, said: 'I have found what I have long been searching for. I am a priest of the great Vishnu temple at Kashi. My master the head priest, hearing of the good deeds of this man, sent me to find him and take him to the temple, that he might have *darshan* of him. And now I will go back to my master and tell him Chamari is dead, and I will repeat to him the words I heard Chamari say'. Then having laid the bundle he was carrying on the ground, and slipped off his sandals, this Brahmin priest approached the foot of the bed and made obeisance to the dead Untouchable.

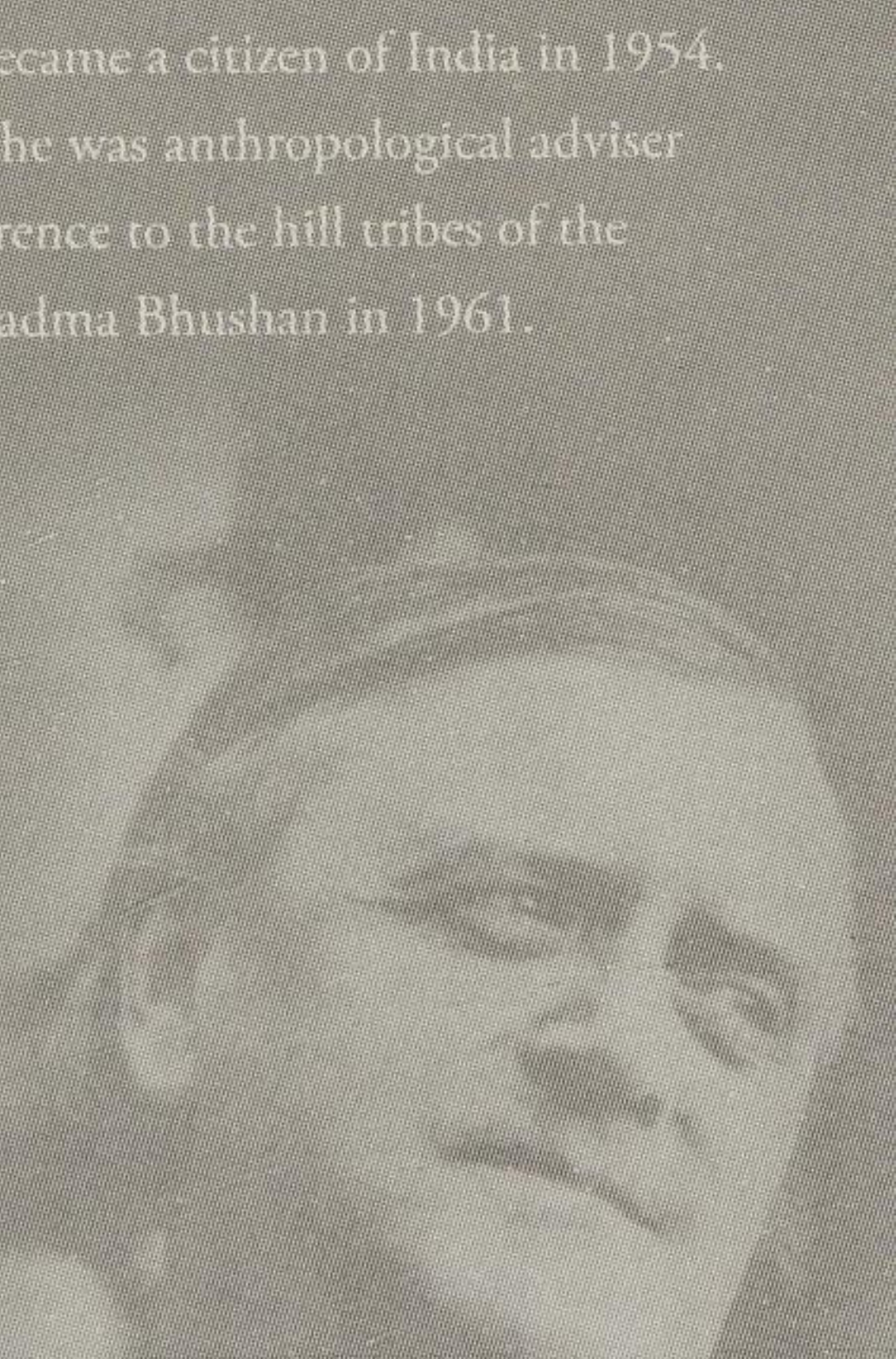
There will never again be a funeral like Chamari's at Mokameh Ghat, for all sections of the community, high and low, rich and poor, Hindu, Mohammedan, Untouchable, and Christian, turned out to pay their last respects to one who had arrived friendless and weighed down with disqualifications, and who left respected by all and loved by many.

Chamari was a heathen, according to our Christian belief, and the lowest of India's Untouchables, but if I am privileged to go where he has gone, I shall be content.

The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin

Verrier Elwin

Verrier Elwin (1902–1964), anthropologist, poet, and activist from England, came to India in 1927 as a missionary. In 1932, he set off with Shamrao Hivale, his lifelong friend and companion, to live and work among the hill tribes of central India. Best known for his work with the Baigas and Gonds of central India, Elwin became a citizen of India in 1954. Thereon, until his death in February 1964, he was anthropological adviser to the Indian government, with special reference to the hill tribes of the North-East Frontier. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1961.



To Eldyth & Basil my oldest friends

Angel Infancy

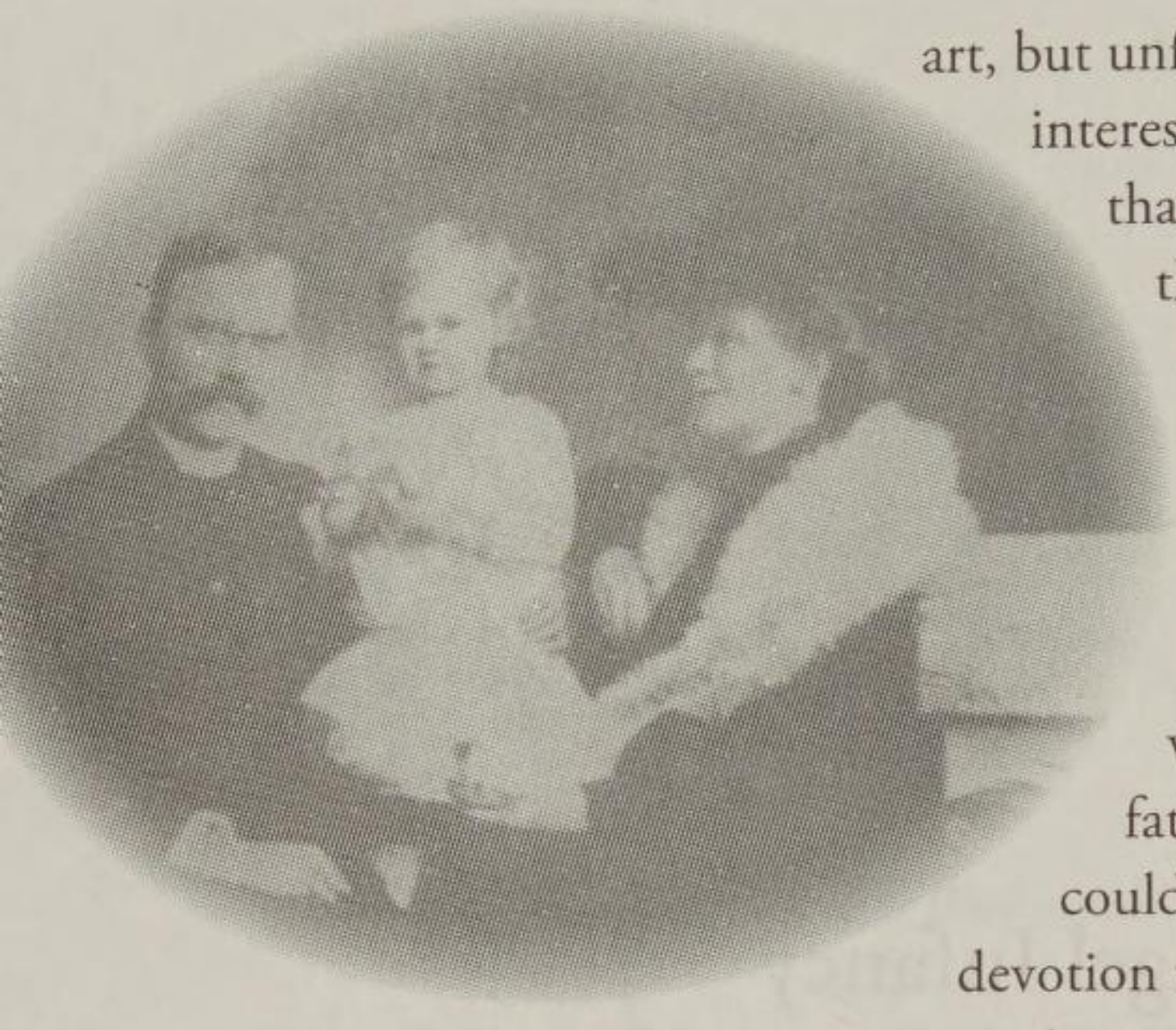
I WAS BORN AT DOVER IN KENT, ENGLAND, IN 1902, ON THE EARLY morning of 29th August, a day which is traditionally associated by the Church with the beheading of John the Baptist. This was, of course, on the birthday of King Herod, which was celebrated by a performance of what would probably today be called tribal dances. It is perhaps significant that I should have arrived in the world on an anniversary marked by dramatic action against a well-known Puritan reformer.

I was the eldest of three children, my sister Eldyth being two years, and my brother Basil some five years, younger.

I was baptised with the names Harry Verrier Holman Elwin by no fewer than three Bishops; long afterwards one of them told me, 'Three of us tried to cast the devil out of you, with remarkably little success.'

My father, Edmund Henry Elwin, was himself an Anglican bishop holding the see of Sierra Leone, but he had been appointed Bishop of Bristol when he suddenly died of yellow fever at the age of 38, when I was seven, only a few weeks before returning to England to take up his new assignment. He had been at Merton, which was to be my own college later on, and after serving as a curate in Oxford he went to West Africa as a missionary. He was at first principal of Fourah Bay College but soon became the youngest bishop in the Church of England. . .

My mother was a beautiful, intelligent and imaginative woman. Witty and well-read, she liked all the right things, poetry, music and



Baby Verrier with Bishop and Mrs Elwin (OUP)

> art, but unfortunately her fundamental interest was in a form of religion that was the negation of all of them. Had my father lived and we had gone to Bristol to the beautiful Cathedral Close to live in dignity and with financial security, her life would have been very different. As it was, my father's death left a gap which could only be filled by a passionate devotion to her children and an equally passionate devotion to religion. There was hardly any money. All her life my mother was afraid of boredom. Apart

from us children there was nothing for her to do. She could not settle down and so we lived in 'rooms'—furnished apartments, generally one bedroom and one sitting-room with a bathroom which we shared with the other lodgers. My mother was continually moving from one place to another, for she could not get on with landladies and we grew up in an atmosphere of catastrophic rows with these formidable women. This meant that as children we had few friends, there was never a garden to play in, very little privacy, and we were generally on 'tour' or 'transfer'.

This was the atmosphere in which I grew up. It was well calculated to impress on a child the importance of the treasures of the spirit, for here there were certainly no treasures of the flesh; it was easy to believe that here we had no abiding city, for we were always moving on.

I went to school in Reigate, a good sound evangelical school, and remember nothing except that I once got six of the best on the old spot for organizing the boys into a sort of union, which demanded shorter hours and better food for lunch. Mother summoned the headmaster to the house and of the two of us I think he suffered the most.

I then went on to another Prep. school at Eastbourne. The headmaster was an enormous red-faced man called Mr P., who taught me one lesson of lifelong value.

One of the assistant masters used to enjoy hanging round the bathrooms and making improper proposals to the little boys as they came

out. This dubious pleasure was, in due course, brought to the attention of Mr P., and he held an inquiry, to which I was summoned as a witness. This was my very first introduction to the harsh realities of sex, if that is the right name for it, and I was embarrassed and confused.

As a result I blushed and stammered through my interrogation and Mr P., towering above me like Jehovah, boomed, 'Call a spade a spade, boy, call a spade a spade.' Ever since, and specially in my book *The Baiga*, I have tried to do this.

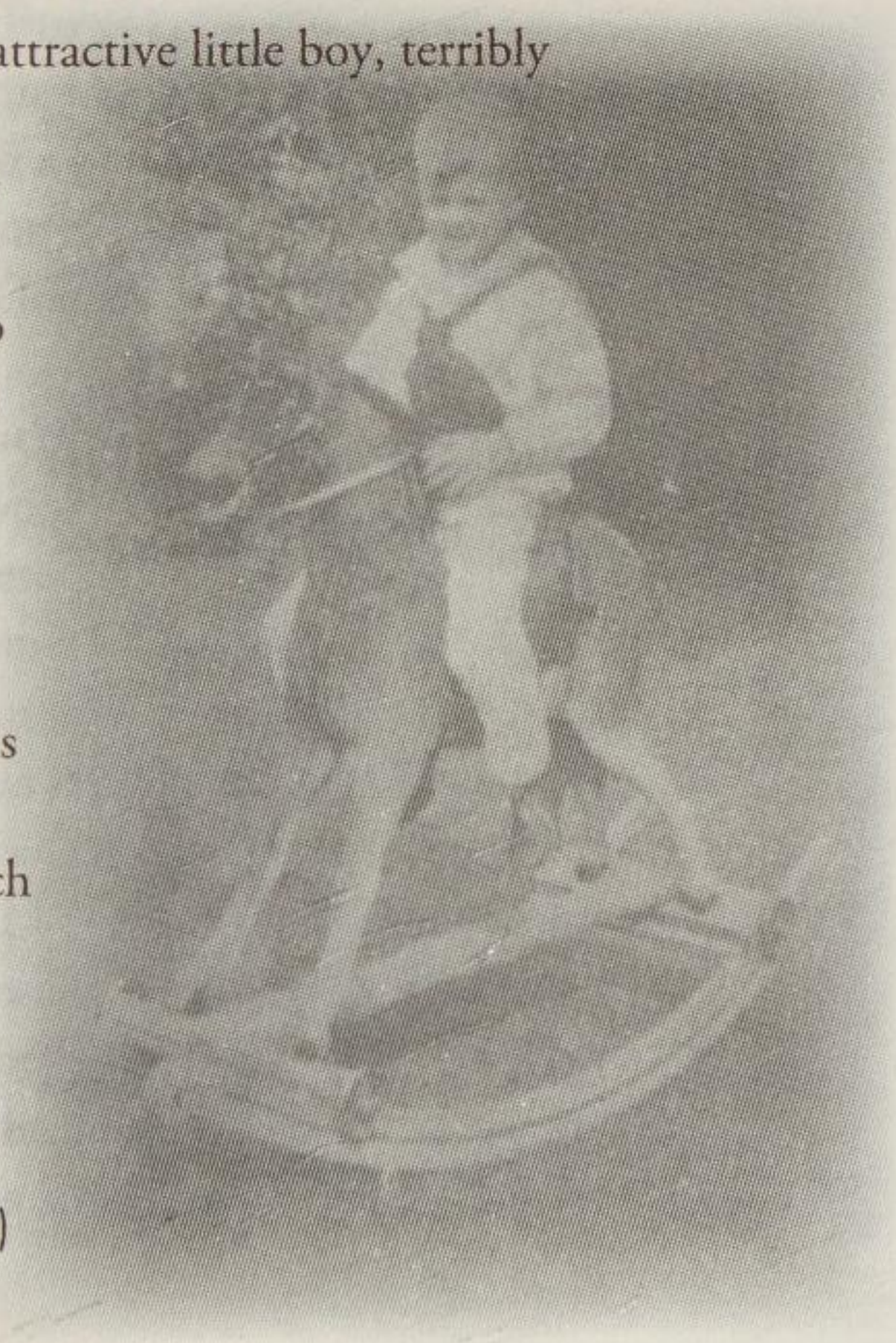
When I was thirteen there was the problem of a Public School. In choosing this the family and their advisers were dominated by the desire to keep me untainted by the Church of Rome and the infidelity which they believed to come from the application of modern scholarship to the Bible.

Finally, on the advice of a missionary friend, I was sent to a west-country school, Dean Close, Cheltenham, which had been founded to uphold the basic principles of evangelical religion, and where certainly there was never any nonsense about applying the ordinary standards of intelligence to the Word of God.

Religion, which played such a strong part in my childhood, therefore, continued to be important at school.

At this time I was a shy, not very attractive little boy, terribly priggish, filled by my uncles with conventional Imperialist ideas and by my mother with the belief that there was nothing, nothing in the world, to compare with the joy of leading souls to Jesus.

From the age of about seven and continuing until my third year at Oxford, a very important part of our life was concerned with the Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM). This was an enterprising organization which arranged missions at seaside resorts throughout the country during the



Verrier, aged five (British Library)

pleasant holiday month of August. A team of workers would descend on some place like Eastbourne or Llanfairfechan and embark on an ambitious programme of meetings, sports and entertainments.

These missions were generally very well done. A sand pulpit was built on the beach and decorated with shells and seaweed. There was a red banner and a lot of jolly singing. There were competitions, all sorts of games, and such things as processions with Chinese lanterns. One of the hymns we sang was 'I am H.A.P.P.Y.'. Another was 'Joy, joy, joy—with joy my heart is ringing' and this accurately expressed my feelings at the time.

But there were two things which were not so good. The first was that the CSSM created a forced and unnatural religious precosity.

The CSSM, like the Buchmanism of a later period, fostered an upper-class religion. Its meetings and entertainments were confined to 'visitors', and town-people were not admitted. Visitors, that is to say the children of parents who could afford to pay for a holiday at a seaside resort, were considered to be of higher caste than the children of residents, who had to be content for their spiritual pabulum with the local Sunday Schools. The result was that, while the CSSM enabled us to make attractive, well-dressed friends of the right class, it introduced a caste barrier based on economic standards which was obviously shocking, and looking back I am astonished that it never occurred to any of us all through those years that there was anything wrong about it. Since then the social revolution in Britain may have changed the CSSM, if it still exists. I hope so, for this was one of the things that I am really ashamed of in my youth. Yet at this time it brought thrills and variety into what was otherwise a rather unexciting life.

Dean Close's prize student, 1919 (OUP)

Just after I went to Dean Close school the First World War broke out. We were far away in the west country and at first it had little effect on us. I was only twelve years old. But gradually, as some of the best masters were called up, the names of old boys began to appear in the casualty lists and the food steadily got worse, some idea of the realities of war began to come home to us. As the days went by we finally found ourselves eating horseflesh and jealously watching our rations of sugar, butter, and bread. We used to swop pats of butter for white mice and postage stamps, and food became a sort of currency.

Later the great influenza epidemic struck the school with great force. It seemed to break out simultaneously in every dormitory and, even more disastrously, in the servants' quarters so that for the first two days there was no one to look after us and no proper food. I remember crawling on hands and knees from my dormitory down to the kitchen in the hope of getting some milk to drink. One of my most admired friends, a really lovely little boy, died. Finally, army nurses came in and took charge.

The war naturally gave a great stimulus to the Officers' Training Corps. I was never very keen on games and used the OTC as an outlet for my surplus energies. Ultimately I rose to be Sergeant-Major and I greatly enjoyed swaggering about in my Sam Browne.

When victory came we were as excited at school as anywhere in the country and as Sergeant-Major I let off a barrage of crackers from the top of the school tower in the early morning of Victory Day. Later, I led a procession that escorted a captured German tank through the streets of Cheltenham.

It never occurred to anyone that there was the least inconsistency between the Scripture classes, where we were taught to love our enemies, and the Bombing classes, where we were taught to kill them.

One of the strongest influences in my life was a young woman—whom I never saw. I was seventeen years old when she was murdered and she was twenty-one. Her name was Bella Wright, pretty and forthcoming, engaged to be married to a stoker. One day her dead body was found on an old Roman road near Leicester.

Six months later one of our masters at Dean Close, a Mr Ronald Light, was arrested and charged with her murder. Mr Light had been teaching me, and I shall never forget the thrill when Dr Flecker rose solemnly in the Great Hall and told us about it. We had sardines

and sausages for high tea that evening . . . to create an optimistic atmosphere.

Mr Light was ultimately acquitted, and we were all happy about it, for he was a pleasant little man, but he did not come back to the school. It was hard to get masters in those war days and we therefore remained one short.

I had managed to establish myself by that time as a special case, for I had decided to take English literature, and the cut fell on me. There was no one to teach me and so Dr Flecker turned me loose in the library and told me to teach myself. Bella Wright's murder thus had the unexpected result that for a whole year I had the opportunity of rummaging about in an excellent collection of books and exploring the main roads and by-ways of poetry. I had to. There was no one to make me work but myself. For someone of a less studious temperament this might have been fatal, but since I was already approaching books in the spirit of a lover, the opportunity to work in freedom gave me those habits of research which I still have.

Dean Close school was riddled, as the headmaster put it, with 'impurity' and though I left school without ever knowing exactly what he meant, I think masturbation and certainly 'little boys' must have been in his mind. Official opposition naturally developed interest in our pretty juniors into what was almost a cult; so far as I know, and certainly in my own case, nothing ever 'occurred', but there was a sweetness and charm, all the attraction of forbidden fruit. There was one boy especially whom I loved, a gifted and beautiful child. We read Rossetti's Italian poems in the original as a romantic way of learning the language; he went to Cambridge and I once stayed with him in King's College after I had gone to Oxford: the luminous beauty of the surroundings and the joy of simply being with him kept me mentally intoxicated for months.

Until I was twenty-one I knew nothing about women and certainly never could have anticipated that one day I would be mentioned half-a-dozen times as an authority on the sexual behaviour of the human female in the Kinsey Report. Tribal children know all about a woman's anatomy, the rules of menstruation and—whatever Malinowski may have said—how babies come, before they are five years old. I knew nothing when I was four times that age.

My boyhood was thus a rather curious affair. During the holidays, we had a life with very few comforts, and virtually no amusements (except

religious ones): in those days there were few cinemas and few cars. We met very few people and my father's friends, such as Willie Holland, Alec Fraser, Tom Alvarez, Walter Miller (names famous in missionary history), who used to come to see that we were all right, were all of a certain highly religious type. We had to work very hard and only once did we have a servant for a short time. My mother did the cooking, cleaning, most of the washing and we children used to help as much as we could. This, so far as I remember, we did not mind at all. It was all rather fun and we did not, in fact, realize at that time how greatly restricted our horizons were nor how much more life had to offer.

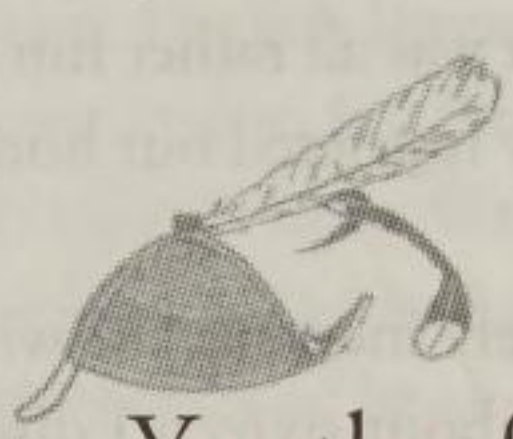
But there was one thing, completely inconsistent with the rest, that made all the difference. When I was about sixteen I discovered poetry and fell in love with the beauty of words. At first, perhaps naturally, I was attracted by Tennyson and similar poets; a little later I was intoxicated by Swinburne; I bought a volume of Yeats' poems out of my meagre pocket-money. But my great joy was Wordsworth.

In the early mornings at school I used to wander out into the woods and fields with a little blue-bound selection of his poems, and I would sit in the peace of that gentle countryside absorbing the gentle message of the poet. This stimulated my love of natural beauty and later I knew no greater happiness than to make walking-tours in the Lake District; once I traced the poet's steps up the River Duddon to its source, reading the Duddon sonnets along the way.

In fact, for the last two years at school I lived in a sort of trance of delight. I was in two worlds which could not be reconciled. Orthodox evangelicalism stood strangely beside the mystical pantheism of Wordsworth, and at that time, and for several years afterwards, I did not know which was the real thing for me. I think I was rather a puzzle to the school staff and I remember one day walking through the headmaster's garden, which had a superb display of roses, with Mrs Flecker and quoting Richard Jefferies to her about 'that pure colour which is rest of heart'. I have rarely seen a woman look so astonished.

I would not like to say that my schooldays were unhappy. As I look back I feel mostly a certain regret, not about happiness but that I could have had so much better an education if I had been put in a different kind of school, taught in a different way and had made other friends. Yet even so I did learn much about the beauty and joy of life.

My home was a place of intense affection. Mother was a darling and looked after us wonderfully. But we were poor and had to grow up the hard way. I am not sorry about that, any more than I regret the later troubles with the Church and the police. The result has been that later, since I had learnt not to expect anything, I was often agreeably surprised, and even now, when anything nice happens to me, I feel grateful to life for being so pleasant after all.



Youth of Delight

I went up to Oxford in the autumn of 1921. My knowledge of life was almost entirely literary, based on books in the school library. I had very little money, it was the first time I had ever been on my own, and I felt rather lost. Moreover, it was a disturbing period for, as Roger Fulford says, in *Right Honourable Gentleman,* of the Oxford of 1921–2:

Never has undergraduate life been more terrifyingly, more scorchingly brilliant than in the years when England settled down to enjoy the peace. The young men of Oxford drank their wines and spirits, spent their fathers' modest fortunes, and put the world to rights with all the poise and sophistication of Victorian clubmen; they gossiped about one another with such backbiting gusto that the University at times recalled the cackling malice of a tea-party at a bridge club for ladies. The fashion for disguising intelligence by behaving like an enthusiastic wasp had spread rapidly to Oxford from Bloomsbury. Discussion of subjects, which is generally profoundly boring, had given place to discussion of people, which is always fascinating; tartness and wit were the essential ingredients of conversation. It is not only the passage of years, not only the tricks of memory, not only the blandishments of social historians which conjure up this sparkling vision; it was in sober fact a brilliant epoch. Oxford in 1922 whispered the last enchantments of the Edwardian Age.

My college was Merton, as it had been my father's, and the Warden, Tommy Bowman, always wrote my father's initials instead of mine.

We had a distinguished set of dons. The greatest, I suppose, was A.C. Bradley, who had a profound influence on T.S. Eliot who had spent a year at Merton reading the Posterior Analytics with Professor Joachim. There was also Sir Walter Raleigh, who tutored me for all too short a time; and W.W. How, the Senior Tutor, who took me through some books of Livy in my first term.

The most remarkable of the dons was, however, H.W. Garrod, the authority on Keats and Wordsworth, a rather devastating person whom I adored.

After suffering the indignity of Pass Mods., which at that time you had to do as a preliminary for a number of Honours Schools, in my third term I started on English Literature. Everyone advised against it, as it was a new School and was said to be one in which it was very hard to get a First. My tutor was David Nichol Smith, a great specialist on eighteenth-century poetry, unbelievably handsome, charming and quiet. Merton also had H.C. Wyld, the terror of generations of women students, my terror too until I came to know him, and I was also taught by Sir George Gordon for a short time.

The teaching at Oxford is, of course, quite different from anything in the world and almost the opposite of the kind of instruction inflicted on students in India. I myself never sat through a single course of lectures in my five years (for I have always believed that the need for lectures disappeared in the fifteenth century, when the printing-press came into use) though I attended a few which promised unusual entertainment. Since most of the dons read out their lectures I did not see why I could not obtain the same result in comfort by reading the stuff in a book. In fact, I was only actually taught for one hour a week but it was extraordinary how effective that teaching could be.

My official studies in English stopped at the year 1800. It was possible to take a further paper covering the whole of the nineteenth century but my tutor advised against it. There was too much 'literature' in it; it was too readable and the examiners accordingly tried to make it as difficult as possible. You were not asked straight questions, for example, about Matthew Arnold's philosophy but were told to compare it with that of

some obscure clergyman, nor would you get a simple question on Carlyle's style. There would always be a catch in it. The result was that my approach to modern poetry was entirely non-professional and I was able to read the Victorians for pleasure and not as a duty.

In 1924 I took my English Finals and was awarded a First. Professor Wyld, rather grumpily, told me that it was a good one and that I had got Alpha Plus for three papers and Alphas for the rest, including, to my great surprise, the three Old English and Language papers. It is significant of the uselessness of much education that within a few years I had forgotten every single thing about Anglo-Saxon and Middle English, at which I had presumably done reasonably well.

After finishing my English course I decided to stay on for another two years and do the Theology Finals, which means you take your B.A. degree all over again, and Merton gave me a generous grant of money to enable me to do so. In my fourth year I had to go out of college and I found digs, near what is now St. Peter's College, which I shared with a very close friend of mine, George Bosworth.

My mother took a furnished house on Headington Hill, a very old and charming house where I used to spend my Sundays. I was fond of cycling in those days and the joy of free-wheeling down into Oxford more than atoned for the labour of pushing my bike up the hill.

After a year in digs, as George Bosworth went to take up his work in a parish, I moved into Wycliffe Hall. This was a theological college in North Oxford which was devoted to teaching theology of a protestant and evangelical character. I did not, however, at this time, have any tuition from the Hall itself as I was still studying through Merton under Green. My mother bought a house for about a thousand pounds in North Oxford—1 Warnborough Road—so I was able to live quite near the family, whom I visited frequently. This year too passed without any very striking outer events and at the end of it I sat for my second final school, which I did with much greater nervousness than before, but again was fortunate enough to get a First.

What a lot of time I wasted during my undergraduate days on religion! The narrow ideas that I had then disappeared from my life long ago and I am doubtful whether at any time they did me very much good. But religion was very exciting then and it did, I suppose, provide an alternative interest, taking the place of bridge or racing.

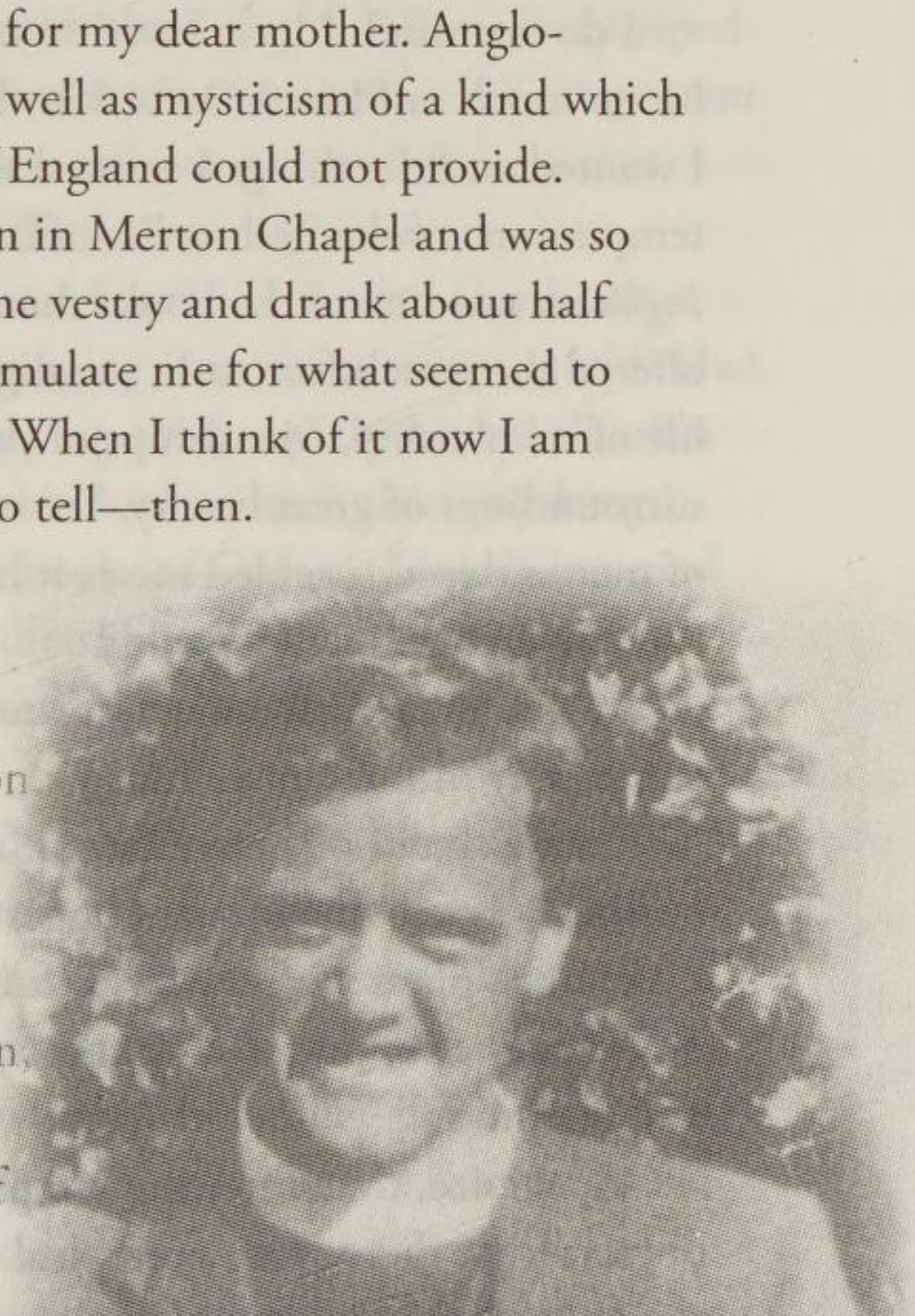
Immediately after I finished my Theology Finals I was appointed Vice-Principal of Wycliffe Hall and a friend of mine, Julian Thornton-Duesbury, who also got a First in the same examination, became Chaplain. A few months later I was ordained in Christ Church Cathedral by Tommy Strong, the Bishop of Oxford, to whom I was greatly devoted and who was, I think, a little fond of me.

I only stayed for a year as Vice-Principal and outwardly the life was conventional and a little dull. Inwardly, however, it was a time of intense excitement. In the first place, I developed my studies in mysticism and my practice of religion to a greater degree than I had ever attempted before.

It was thus not unnatural that I should find myself definitely turning to Catholicism, not the real thing, but its substitute in Anglo-Catholicism. I had no objection to Rome, but it was unfamiliar and would have been altogether too much for my dear mother. Anglo-Catholicism had poetry and beauty as well as mysticism of a kind which the evangelical party in the Church of England could not provide.

I made my first confession to Green in Merton Chapel and was so nervous that I went beforehand into the vestry and drank about half a bottle of the communion wine to stimulate me for what seemed to me an appalling review of a sinful life. When I think of it now I am astonished how little there was really to tell—then.

This, of course, put me in a rather difficult position. I was an important official of an institution which represented the spearhead of opposition to the Anglo-Catholic movement. I was expected to teach theology from a particular angle and to give the arguments against the Mass, confession, Mariolatry and other exercises of religion connected with the Church of Rome. Towards the end of my year it became evident that the position was impossible.



A gent with a dog collar—the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall Seminary, Oxford, 1926 (Wycliffe Hall)

At the end of that summer term, therefore, I found myself without a job and went to live at home with my mother. I was faced with a number of possibilities. I was already Chaplain at Merton and it would not have been difficult to establish my position there. There was a possibility of my going to the House and the offer of a Fellowship at Keble. I was certain of getting something, and something attractive, by the autumn term.

But my resignation from Wycliffe Hall set me thinking again. My former tutor, Green, a very wise man who always had a great influence on me, felt strongly that I should not stay in Oxford and insisted that I should go to a parish in the slums of London or one of the industrial cities and live among poor and ordinary people. I did actually try to arrange this but it fell through. Other influences then began to turn my thoughts to India.

I do not think I have loved anything in the world all my life so much as I loved Oxford in those days. It had everything I wanted and the things I wanted then were not just the temptations of the flesh, a life of comfort and ease. *John Inglesant* was one of the books that influenced me. Oxford offered the search for truth, the dignity and interest of a life of scholarship, friendships of the most stimulating kind, surroundings of great beauty. Yet it did not satisfy me; 'some life of men unblest' troubled me as it had troubled the Scholar Gipsy and driven him into the wilds.

At that time, and, in fact, for many years afterwards, I was completely indifferent to finance.

I was also curiously indifferent to ambition, as I have always been. My family never even suggested to me that one should make one's plans with a view to future preferment. The thing to do was quite simply, as we put it at that time, to discover the Will of God and follow it.

My choice, therefore, was simplified to some extent and it was obvious that there was a great deal to be said for India. My family had a very long connexion with the country.* Even more impelling was

* Pub.: Grandfather William Laban Holman joined the East India Company and was one of the founders of the hill station of Murree, now in Pakistan, where Elwin's mother was born. Uncle Herbert Holman was posted in the 16th Bengal Lancers. Two of Elwin's

an impulse which was very real indeed at the time and had a strong influence on my thinking.

The Catholic religion lays stress on a spiritual ideal which is known as reparation. Christ made reparation for the sins of the world. The saints through their prayers and sufferings make reparation for their own sins and those of others. During my later years in Oxford this became translated into the desire to make reparation to the poor for the way more privileged people had behaved to them. Now in relation to India I remembered how my family had made its money, such as it was, out of India, and my countrymen had gone to India to exploit it and to rule.

I thought, therefore, that I might go to India as an act of reparation, that from my family somebody should go to give instead of to get, to serve with the poorest people instead of ruling them, to become one with the country that we had helped to dominate and subdue. This idea became sufficiently important to break up my Oxford career and was the driving force that carried me through many difficult years in India.

When I made this decision I felt that I was leaving for ever the life of scholarship and plunging into an unknown world. Had I realized it I was, in fact, stepping on to a path that would offer me infinitely greater opportunities of research than anything I could have found among the books of Oxford. My self-imposed exile enabled me to study endlessly varied human beings along untrodden ways. Fourteen years later Oxford gave me the D.Sc. for these researches.

When I first went up to Oxford I knew nothing about India except what my more conventional relations had taught me. Indians were wogs or natives. They were incapable of self-government and had to be kept in their proper place. In my third year, however, I met Bernard Aluwihare who, although he came from Ceylon and not from India, was an ardent supporter of the Indian national movement and in his own charming person was the best possible antidote to the ideas about Asia in which I had been brought

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uncles were ex-ICS, and two sons of one of them resigned from the ICS at the time of Independence.

up. He introduced me to the writings of Tagore and the opinions of Gandhi. He lent me books on Indian philosophy and gradually changed my entire outlook.

In my fifth year and during the year I was teaching in North Oxford other influences strengthened my interest in India. A gentle and spiritual Christian ascetic, the Sadhu Sunder Singh, visited Oxford and made a deep impression on many of us. Professor Heiler visited the University a little later and gave some lectures: he was, I think, the first German theologian to come to Oxford after the War and, as he had written a book on the Sadhu, we had interesting discussions about the mysticism of East and West. Then came Jack Winslow.

Father Jack Winslow was the founder of an ashram-settlement called the Christa Seva Sangh. He had been a missionary in western India for many years, but after a time had decided to break away from conventional ecclesiastical activity in order to identify himself more closely with the poor and with Indian nationalism and culture. There was a great deal to Winslow. He had studied certain aspects of Indian mysticism and made them his own. He knew a lot about yoga in theory and practice. He might have been a great Christian leader. He certainly was a powerful Christian stimulant—but subsequent history proved that you cannot live on cocktails. At all events he captivated me and others with a vision of what Christianity might be once it became truly oriental in character.

I took to this new idea with enthusiasm and before I had left England I had made some study of Hindu philosophy and religion and had worked out various ways in which Christian architecture, art, philosophy, mysticism and worship could be approximated to the oriental model. Even today, when these things, I am afraid, are not so important to me as they once were, I believe that the suggestions I made then were valid.

The Christa Seva Sangh was founded to explore the possibilities of the reorientalization of the Christian religion. This was no new thing. Father Stevens, the Jesuit, one of the first Englishmen to come to India, wrote a version of the Bible in the form of a Purana. The Abbé Dubois lived and dressed in Indian style and is said to have composed a supplement to the Vedas proving the truth of Christian doctrine. In

more modern times, the well-known Bombay historian, Father Heras, had worked at the Indianization of Church architecture.

The Christa Seva Sangh set out ambitiously enough to develop this, though it did not carry on long enough to have much effect.

Two of my best friends—one from Oxford, Oliver (Bernard) Fielding-Clarke, and the other from Cambridge, Algy Robertson—were attracted by Winslow's plan, and in the summer of 1927 resolved that they would join him and help to build up the small Order which he had founded in Poona. After a long struggle I finally decided to go with them.

This meant more than merely leaving Oxford for an unknown India. It also implied that there was a serious possibility that we would become monks, ultimately taking vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. For about three years we were all very serious about this and Algy continued as a monk or rather as a sort of friar to the end of his life, though Bernard and I both for various reasons gave up the idea.

Fortunately my mother, though she disliked the 'monkish' side, did not object to my going abroad, and Eldyth was keen on it. Gandhi's ideas, while irritating enough to the British politicians and the orthodox bishops, were proving rather stimulating to the more unconventional. My mother, for example, whom one would not have thought likely to be attracted by one who was in some ways a rival and critic of Christianity, became interested in Gandhi, and five years later when he visited England for the Round Table Conference and he went to visit her in her house at Oxford, she became enthusiastic. She carried on a lengthy correspondence with his secretary, a remarkable man called Mahadev Desai, and was perhaps typical of many who were attracted by the new Indian political philosophy.

After deciding to join the erratic, but devoted, company of the CSS I busily got ready to go to India. I received no money from the Society. Indeed, the idea was that we would get no money for we should not need it, and if we had any we should in any case have to hand it over, since we would not be allowed to have private possessions. In actual fact, I was, by the end of my time at Oxford, almost penniless and in considerable difficulty until we left. The Society bought us third-class tickets by rail across Europe and then on a French passenger boat leaving Genoa for Colombo. Third-class passengers who, before being allowed

on board, were examined for venereal disease, were herded into cabins of six or eight at a time. We were incredibly uncomfortable but each of us saw himself as a young apostle braving all discomforts and we were carried along on a wave of excitement.

Saints and Satyagrahis

We arrived at Colombo on November 30th 1927 and after a few days in Ceylon, during which we visited Kandy, we went up to Malabar.

Then we travelled by train across India to Poona, where we found a disconcertingly conventional group of buildings in the middle of a large field on the outskirts of the town, very near the Agricultural College, with Father Winslow and some Indian brothers of the Christa Seva Sangh to greet us. We immediately settled down to a rather odd life, certainly very odd by the standards of 1927 when Englishmen, especially the clergy, were expected to behave properly. We slept on the floor and, in fact, since there was practically no furniture, we did everything on the floor, which was very much in line with the practice of Hindu homes in western India at that time. We ate Indian food (with dispensation for invalids) and were rather particular about the way this was served, in the proper dishes—big brass plates, with a number of little pots—and the ceremonial washing of the hands before and after meals. We naturally removed our sandals whenever we entered a building. The regular dress of members of the Sangh was white khadi made into a 'habit' and those who had taken preliminary vows were entitled to wear saffron girdles.

Our inner lives were in a state of constant turmoil and excitement, but the first external event of note was a visit to Sabarmati in January 1928. Bombay has always been a cosmopolitan and liberal city and a number of intellectuals there had recently started a branch of the Inter-Religious Fellowship—the President was the veteran Professor P.A. Wadia. This body met regularly in Bombay for what were called non-denominational prayers and once a year had a conference which

Elwin with Gandhi, Sabarmati Ashram, 1931, the dutiful Mirabhen following (OUP)

was attended by adherents of all religions. In 1928 the venue of the conference was in Mahatma Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati near Ahmedabad.

From the moment of my arrival there I was doomed. For long a sympathetic fellow-traveller, I now became an ardent disciple. At this time, the national movement of India had risen to a pitch of sincerity and devotion that has rarely been equalled in the political upheavals of the world. The ashram itself, standing on the tall banks of the Sabarmati river, was the home of some hundreds of people marked by that quiet and disciplined devotion to hard work and to the poor which was then characteristic of the best type of Congressman. Among them Gandhi walked in almost unearthly dignity and beauty. That was the first thing that struck me about him—his beauty, and the inner spiritual power that transformed his frail body and filled the entire place with kindliness and love.

The impact of those few days at Sabarmati was extraordinary. It was as if I had suddenly been reborn as an Indian on Indian soil. Everything fell into place so naturally that I did not, I think, realize at first how very serious was the new attitude I adopted or what the consequences would be.

At first I did not see the conflict as between India and Britain but rather as between two different kinds of people. My theme was freedom and this was not confined to India. The prize-essay on the poetry of revolution which I wrote at Oxford had shown me how many Europeans, and particularly how many of the English poets, had treasured liberty. Many of the ideas inspiring India's national movement came originally from the West. Tolstoy and Ruskin had a profound influence on Gandhi. The first result of my contact with him, therefore, was to put me among those Europeans, those Englishmen, to whom colonialism or imperialism was intolerable, to whom the freedom of subject peoples everywhere was a passion, a consuming ideal.

After Sabarmati and its stirring consequences, the next dramatic event in my life was that I very nearly died. All through 1928 I was undoubtedly playing with my health. I not only sat and slept on the floor. I went a little further and sat and slept on a cement floor with nothing to protect me but a thin piece of sacking. I gave up my mattress and even my pillows in an ardour for self-discipline. I went barefoot, ate anything I was given. This was all right during the earlier part of the year but, when the hot weather, which at least kept the cement warm, yielded to the rains, it should have been obvious to anybody but a young idiot that what he was doing was very silly. Someone remarked that I was only kept going by Wodehouse, whisky and the Holy Ghost.

The result was that, despite these prophylactics, I developed dysentery in an acute form, was rushed to hospital and for six weeks hovered, as they say, between life and death. I was unconscious for part of the time and only those who have had a severe attack of dysentery in the days before the new antibiotics were invented, will know the intense pain and appalling exhaustion it caused. Telegrams were sent to my family in England preparing them for the worst and I was told (afterwards) that suitable arrangements had been made with the local undertaker. The Bishop of Bombay came to give me the last rites—Extreme Unction, which prepares the soul for death.

At the same time the bishop, Palmer of Balliol who possessed to the full the Oxford blend of idealism and commonsense, brought three bottles of champagne under his cassock and persuaded the doctors that this was really the best thing they could give me. Even if it failed to keep me alive, he pointed out, it would dispatch me on my long journey in the right mood. In actual fact, I suspect that the bishop's champagne

saved my life. From the very first glass I began to mend and within a month I was tottering about, extremely weak but fit to go on living.

But the Poona doctors were emphatic that I would need a full year of convalescence and it was decided that the best thing for me to do would be to return to Oxford and do a little research there in the hope that I would be able to come back again to India at the end of that period.

This year in England was a profitable one. I spent almost all the time in Oxford in my mother's house and this gave me the opportunity to read widely in the Bodleian and other libraries. In fact, I hardly did anything else except read and write and I actually produced three small books. One was a study of mysticism in a book which I called *Christian Dhyana*.

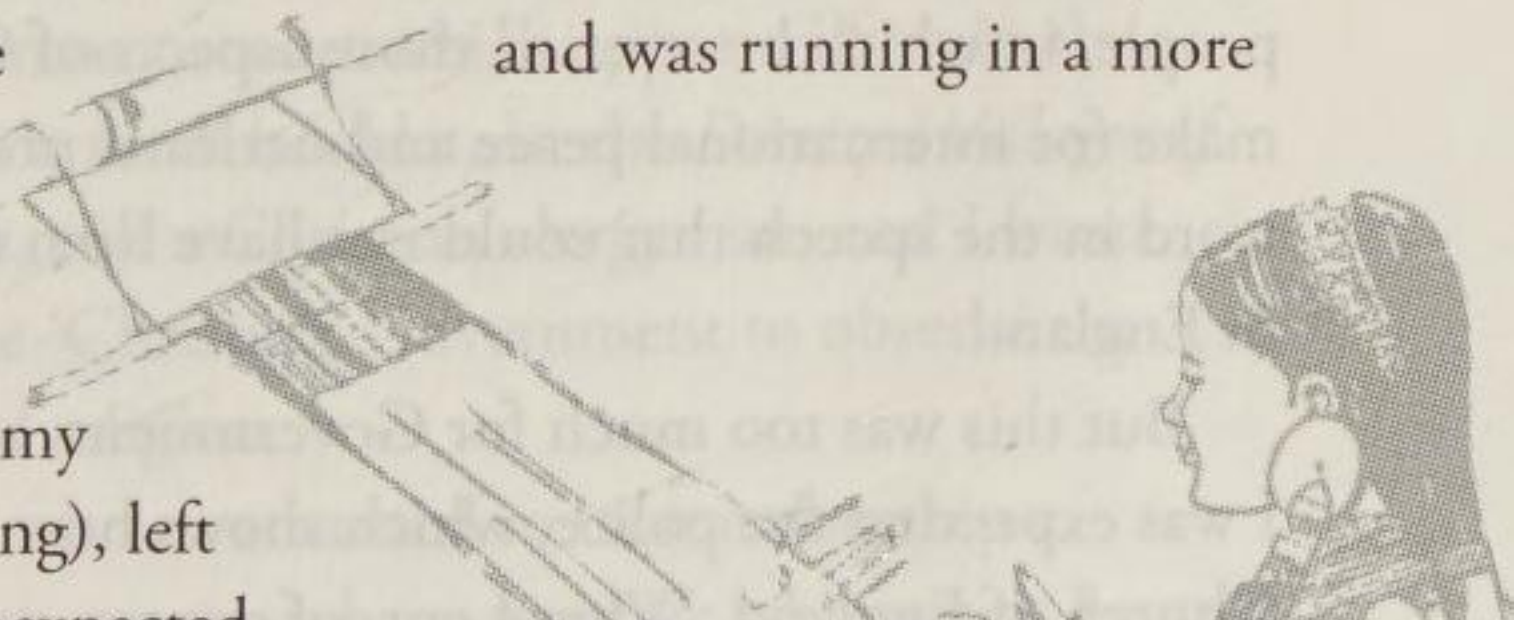
A second was a little book called *Studies in the Gospels* which I had been asked to write by the Inter-Religious Fellowship; similar studies of the Koran and the Bhagavad-Gita, the latter by C. Rajagopalachari, appeared at about the same time.

The third book, which I did not complete immediately, though I collected all the materials, was a study of the English mystic, Richard Rolle, whose message I tried to express in terms of Hindu *bhakti*. Later, in Karanjia, I wrote a companion book on St Francis of Assisi, whose life and message I also tried to interpret in Indian terms.

In the autumn of 1929 I was considered well enough to return to India and I travelled, first to Assisi and then, in the agreeable company of Leonard Schiff, to Palestine.

From Palestine we went on to India and reached Poona at the end of November. We found that the Christa Seva Sangh had now become, both in appearance and organization, much more of a real monastery or ashram. It was a pretty place and was running in a more ordered fashion.

Almost immediately, however, Winslow decided to go on leave and, rather to my dismay (for I was far too young), left me in charge. This had an unexpected result. Winslow was very sympathetic to India's desire for freedom, but he



belonged to the ranks of those liberal-minded Englishmen who talked about fulfilling India's legitimate aspirations, which could mean almost anything according to the interpretation you put on the word 'legitimate'. He had always managed to keep in with both parties to this great dispute.

When he left we rather let ourselves go: with the cat away the mice had a great time. I hoisted the revolutionary tricolour over the ashram on the plea that since the Anglican cathedral in Bombay flew the Union Jack from its spire there was no reason why we should not fly the flag of India. The real crisis, however, came not through anything I did myself but from a lecture which I arranged to be given in the ashram hall.

At this time the press was excited by the appearance in India of a young Englishman who was chosen by Gandhi to be the bearer of one of his famous letters to the Viceroy. Gandhi's emissary, with his flaxen hair and khaki shorts, breaking into the world of immaculately dressed ADC's, excited public imagination almost as much as the half-naked fakir striding up the steps of Viceregal Lodge to parley with the King's Representative on equal terms. He was Reginald Reynolds, who later married Ethel Mannin, wrote a history of water-closets and became my very dear friend. At that time Reginald, like myself, suffered from the unpardonable crime of youth. Nothing he said could be correct; nothing he did could be proper, because he was young. In his untimely death a few years ago he finally paid his debt to the enthusiasms of his younger days.

At that time I hardly knew who Reginald Reynolds was. But when he wrote to me asking for the hospitality of the ashram for a few days on his way to England, I naturally sent him, as I sent everybody, a warm invitation to stay with us. He came and charmed us all by his simplicity and wit. I asked him to give a lecture in the ashram on the Gandhian philosophy, and he gave an unusually fine address to a great crowd of people, in which he stressed those aspects of Gandhi's teaching which make for international peace and national progress. There was not a word in the speech that could not have been delivered in any cathedral in England.

But this was too much for Government, and they at last got busy. I was expecting the police, which shows how little I knew about the Church of England. What I got, of course, was the Archdeacon. He wrote to me saying that Government was seriously upset at our entertaining a person like Reginald Reynolds, and asking for an

explanation of my conduct. There was not much that could be explained, but I remember saying how astonishing I found it that this question should be raised by a representative of the Church instead of the CID.

After this I was chased by the police and shadowed by chaplains of the Establishment.

It says much, however, for the Christa Seva Sangh that it did not allow the constant pressure from the Church leaders and increasing vexations from the CID to turn it aside from what it felt to be right. With the full approval of the other members, for example, I entertained Subhas Chandra Bose and at the end of 1930 I was allowed to accept an invitation from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, later Home Minister in the Government of independent India to visit Gujarat and make an inquiry into police repression of the No-Tax Campaign that had been started there.

Shamrao Hivale, sometime in the mid-1930s (Verrier Elwin/ British Library)

This campaign was on a very wide scale, and the Government had taken strong measures to counter it, so strong indeed that in many places almost the whole population had migrated into the neighbouring Baroda State. I visited over sixty villages in five talukas—Anand, Nadiad, Borsad, Bardoli, and Jalalpur—and wrote a report which appeared first in the *Bombay Chronicle* and later as a small booklet, In the *Deserted Villages of Gujarat*. I was then, of course, still a Christian clergyman, and I wrote very strongly, appealing to the 'Christian' Government to observe the principles of its own professed religion.

While I was in Poona the ashram attracted to its membership a number of remarkable Indians, among whom was one who was to be my lifelong friend and ally. This was Shamrao Hivale, whose name appears frequently in these pages.

Shamrao and I worked together for many years until I went to NEFA. He was (and is) a wonderful companion and his simplicity of heart and unfailing cheerfulness carried us through many difficulties.

The years 1928 to 1932, during which I was closely in contact with Gandhi and his followers, were critical for India's future. It was now that the old national demand for dominion status was abandoned in favour of a demand for complete independence. It was now that Nehru clarified and proclaimed his views on republicanism and socialism and the Congress gradually found itself committed to a socialist pattern of society.

[These were the eventful days of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Dandi March and the First Round Table Conference.] During these years my association with the Christa Seva Sangh was gradually waning, and I paid a number of visits to the Sabarmati ashram. The programme of the ashram was a strenuous and austere one.

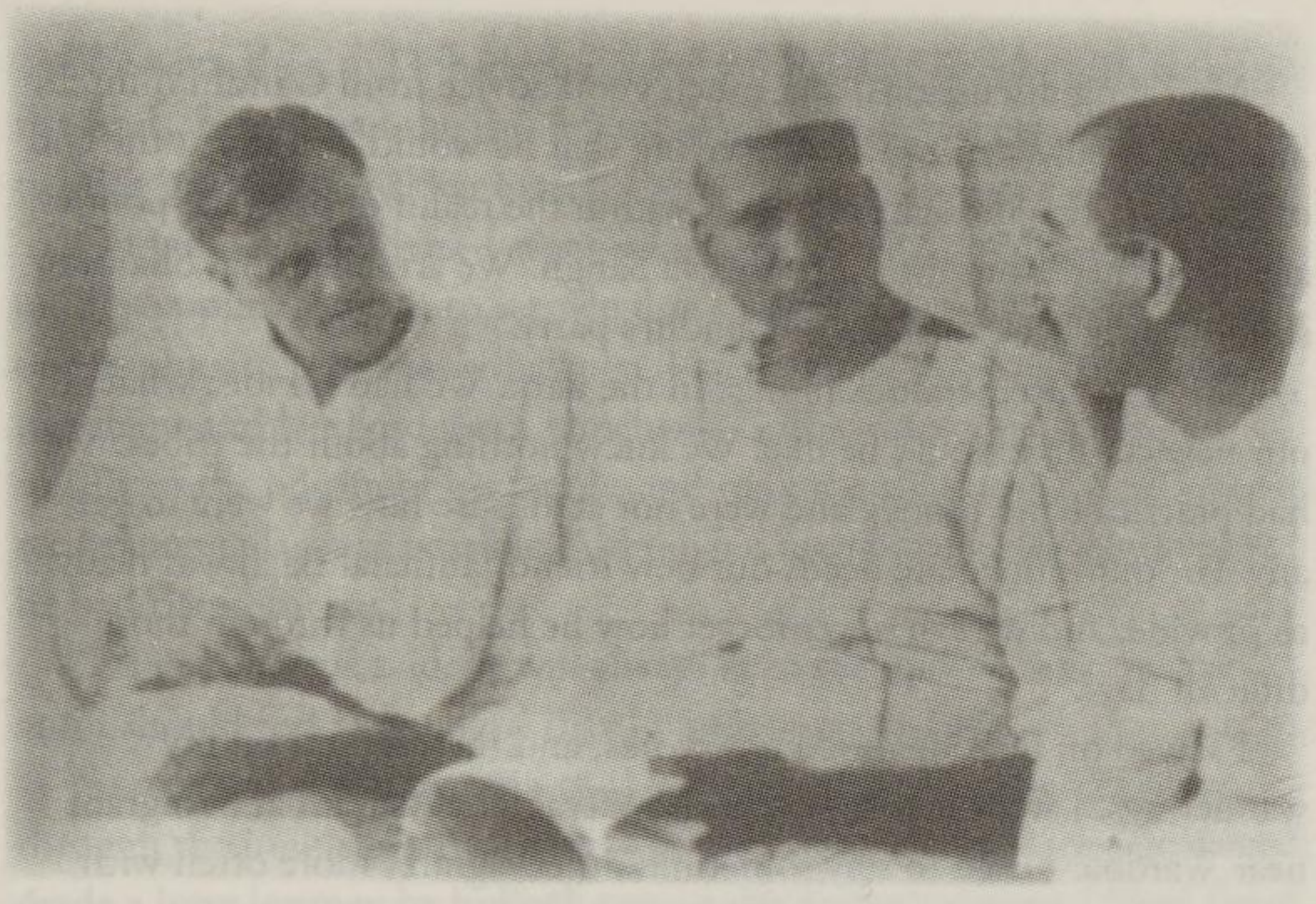
The chief features of the life were given as Body-labour (everyone was expected to do eight hours' work a day), Economy (expenses were reduced to Rs 12 a month, and no private property was permitted), Discipline, Cleanliness, Punctuality. Full members took six vows—Truth, Ahimsa (Love), Celibacy, Control of the Palate, Non-stealing (in the sense that it is theft if we have articles which we do not really need) and Non-possession.

A few years earlier, Miss Slade, who soon became famous in India under her new name, Mirabehn, had joined the ashram at the inspiration of Romain Rolland.

She was a talented and attractive girl of colossal determination and came of a distinguished naval family, but by the time I reached the ashram she had cut off all her beautiful hair.

Bapu regarded her as his daughter and I was greatly excited one day in 1930 when he said to me, 'As Mirabehn is my daughter, so you shall be my son.' From that day I regarded myself as a citizen of India.

My experiences during these months were decisive for my whole life. I came to the conclusion that I must leave the Christa Seva Sangh and go to live in some very poor village where I would be in closest contact with the people.



Elwin with his fellow followers Jamnalal Bajaj and Pyarelal (in spectacles), Dhulia Jail, 1932 (OUP)

One day as I was driving through the streets of Ahmedabad with Sardar Vallabhbhai and Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, I heard for the first time in my life—from the lips of Jamnalal—the magic word 'Gond'.

'Why don't you come to the Central Provinces,' he said, 'and do something for a tribe which is almost entirely neglected both by national workers and by missionaries?'

I liked what Jamnalal had to tell me about the Gonds, and decided to visit their country before the end of the year.

In the meantime I had written to Shamrao who was in England where he had been sent by the CSS, telling him of my plans and asking him if he would join me. We were still, it must be remembered, thinking of ourselves as members of the Church, and Shamrao still hoped to be ordained. To join me at that moment meant cutting short his training in England. Our idea was that we would live together in a small ashram in a Gond village. We would identify ourselves with the positive aspects of the national movement. We would continue to be members of the Church, and would draw up a Rule of Franciscan living. We would not, however, do any missionary work or preaching, and we would not aim at any kind of conversion. Our ashram would be open to people of any faith or of none.

After long discussions, and much good advice from Gandhi himself, Shamrao finally sent me a cable saying that he would join me at the end of the year. This brought my plans within the realm of practical politics, and I resigned from the Christa Seva Sangh. We arranged that Shamrao should come back to India in Gandhi's party.

This was a tremendous plunge in the dark. We had no idea what our new country would be like. We knew nothing about the tribes. We had practically no money and were not at all sure how we were to get any. For our immediate needs our new friend Jamnalal Bajaj was ready to provide, and we can never forget how he helped us through those difficult days.

I stayed on in Poona for a few weeks, and then set out on my wanderings. I went first to stay at the Satyagraha Ashram at Sevagram near Wardha. I used to stay sometimes in Sevagram, more often with Jamnalal Bajaj who lived not far away.

Jamnalal went, of course, to jail and one day I travelled to Dhulia to see him. I was so shocked at the way he, as a class C prisoner, was being treated that I took a vow (everyone was doing this sort of thing then) that I would go barefoot until India won her independence. The only exception to this was that I should not make myself conspicuous and so I put on sandals when I visited a town. I kept this vow for about fifteen years and got so used to it and saved such a lot of money on socks, shoes, and polish that I felt rather sorry when I no longer had an excuse to continue.

About this time I went with A.V. Thakkar (Thakkar Bapa), perhaps the most prominent of the social workers of his day, on a ten-day tour to see what was being done for the 'untouchables' and this made a great impression on me. We first went to Bombay, and put up at the Servants of India Society, where we were most kindly received by the labour leader, N.M. Joshi. In Bombay, we spent some crowded days visiting the tenements of the Bhangis (the Sweepers who, in the absence of the flush-system, remove the refuse from the lavatories).

From Bombay Thakkar Bapa and I went on to a place called Jalhod, where we stayed with a landowner, and a deputation of sweepers waited on Thakkar Bapa, but they were not admitted to the house or even to the courtyard, and we had to talk to them sitting in the street under a steady downpour of rain.

We went then to Dohad, the centre of Thakkar Bapa's work among the Bhils. Here I had the (to me) novel experience of opening and naming a street—Thakkar Street.

On Jamnalalji's advice I went up to Betul, a charming country town on the Satpura plateau, to see whether I could find a suitable place for our headquarters in that tribal area. I had an introduction to a leading merchant and landlord, Seth Dipchand Gothi, who entertained me royally in the bosom of his family, and took me about the countryside to see as many places as possible. Although a man of considerable wealth, he had no motor car.

'If I get one,' he said, 'it will always be commandeered by officials, and I should feel so annoyed that I prefer to go on foot.'

So we went down by train to the Tapti river, and tramped on foot through the jungle, visiting a number of Gond villages. Afterwards we made a long journey by bullock-cart in the Korku country. I liked Betul very much and was fascinated by the Gonds and Korkus, even though I had a foretaste of what village life would mean in the way I was pursued by the police wherever I went. At that time I used to wear a dhoti tied Madrasi-fashion and a long shirt which hung down outside. Both, of course, were of khadi. For a few days I even put on a Gandhi cap. But this gave me so criminal an appearance in the eyes even of my dearest friends that I abandoned it. It was not remarkable, therefore, that an Englishman so unorthodoxly dressed should have attracted the notice of the police, especially as Betul had been the scene of some violent struggles between Government and the tribesmen.

From Betul I went to Chhindwara, where I was fortunate to have a car put at my disposal, and I was taken up to the beautiful village of Tamia on the Pachmarhi road. Unhappily, I was not the first person to think Tamia a suitable place to live in. There were missionaries in the neighbourhood, a Government dispensary and even a dak bungalow. Beautiful as it was, therefore, I had to abandon the idea of settling in Chhindwara.

When I got back to Wardha I found myself at a loose end, for it was not possible

for me to go and settle in a village until Shamrao returned, even if I could have got land and made arrangements in time, and he was not due back from England until Christmas. I went, therefore, to stay with Acharya Kripalani, later a celebrated and controversial politician, at Meerut.

After a few days studying the khadi industry there, I went with Kripalani on a tour in the United Provinces. I could not have had a better companion and we visited all the bigger places and many of the smaller and more interesting ones—Muttra, Brindaban, Hardwar, Hrishikesh, Ayodhya.

During my tour in the United Provinces, I came for the first time into real contact with Indian poverty, for the villages of the CP and the UP were much poorer than those of Gujarat or Maharashtra. As Kripalani said to me, 'No one with any imagination should visit these places. It is almost more than I can bear.' He was right.

The tour was surprisingly uneventful. But we were investigated by the police on various occasions, and once, in Cawnpore, an order was passed forbidding us to hold any public meeting.

Our last visit on the way down to Bombay to meet Gandhi on his return from the Round Table Conference—Shamrao too was travelling with him—was to Jubbulpore.

From Jubbulpore, Kripalani and I travelled down to Bombay. For Kripalani, of course, the great event was the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi. For me Shamrao's return to India seemed even more important. I managed to get a special pass to go on board the boat. It was a very impressive sight that morning, for the whole of the great city seemed to have turned out to welcome Gandhi, and the immediate approaches to the docks were lined with saffron-robed Desh Sevikas.

The following day Shamrao and I went up to Matheran in order to make our plans for the future in some degree of quiet. But after only three days a telegram arrived from Mahadev Desai asking us to come at once. We left in less than ten minutes, got a couple of horses, and rode down the hill to a station from which we could get a quick train to Bombay.

Gandhi was staying in a house called Mani Bhuvan and he invited us to stay with him there. There was great excitement in the city; the Viceroy

had finally rejected the Congress offer of peace; Nehru was already in jail, and the arrest of other national leaders was expected at any moment.*

Among the instructions scribbled for Mahadev Desai after the arrest was one asking me to go to the North-West Frontier Province to discover what was really happening there. Disquieting reports had filtered down to Bombay about the severe repression of the 'Red-Shirt' movement;** no journalists were admitted, all press reports were strictly censored, and as a result there was a great deal of concern about the fate of the Pathans who had so unexpectedly adopted Gandhi's non-violent technique. I was the first 'reporter' to get in, and this, I later heard with some complacency, rather annoyed the India Office.

The movement was highly organized: it had its Generals, Colonels, Captains, and its rank and file: it even had its own CID. The whole country was divided into 'Districts': there was a 'civil' as well as a 'military' administration; each District had its Jirga or Local Board with President and committee, as well as its 'garrison' in charge of a Colonel or Major.

Government soon began to be seriously worried. The numbers of the Red-Shirts swelled to over a hundred thousand; their organization was excellent: they were in a position to paralyse the administration; a parallel Government had practically been established: the prestige and influence of Abdul Ghaffar Khan was paramount. Towards the end of the year, therefore, an ordinance was promulgated and the entire General Staff of the Red-Shirts was arrested. Abdul Ghaffar Khan himself went to jail on Christmas Day. Within a week, every Red-Shirt officer, from Colonel to Subedar, and every President and Secretary of the district Jirgas was in jail.

Mahadev Desai wanted us (for I insisted on taking Shamrao with me) to start for Peshawar at once but I had no money for the fare, nor

* Pub.: Bapu was arrested in the early hours of the next morning and left instructions with Mahadev Desai about what he wanted Elwin to do.

** Pub.: The 'Red-Shirt' movement was a rather misleading name given to the remarkable non-violent nationalist activities of an organization started by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan among the fiery Pathans of the Frontier. The 'Khudai Khidmatgars' had nothing at all to do with the Communists but got their name from their uniform of shirts dipped in brick-dust mixed with water.

had anyone else. Devadas Gandhi, therefore, took us round to visit two or three wealthy merchants in Bombay and very quickly collected the small sum—I think it was only 300 rupees—which we felt (as usual thinking that money didn't matter) would be required.

In spite of all difficulties, we managed to get a certain amount of information in Peshawar, though it was very difficult to persuade people to say anything and most of them would only come to see me at night, creeping furtively to the back door of a house or meeting me in some obscure room.

On the third day we visited a number of villages round Peshawar and on the fourth day had a wonderful drive through the wild and rugged hills to Kohat in a car we managed to hire.

On the fifth day we went up the Khyber Pass, walking down from Landi Kotal to Zintara. There was occasional rifle fire round us—'Just a family feud,' said our guide casually. We visited some of the tribal villages and discussed the situation with the Afridis. I remember telling Shamrao, as we approached Peshawar again, that as we now had finished our work, all we had to do was to become heroes by being arrested. Before going up the Pass I had sent a letter to the Deputy Commissioner telling him why we had come and asking him if I could have an interview so that I could hear the official view of things and so make my report more balanced. When we got out of the station at Peshawar I received the answer to my letter in two English police officers and some constables with an order of deportation.

The policeman who actually arrested me was an amusing person and kept on saying he was 'damned sorry'. They took us back to the Dak Bungalow and searched our baggage but were unable to find anything. We were allowed to stay on in our rooms under open arrest, but Caroe [the District Magistrate] ordered that I should leave Peshawar by the most inconvenient train in the day.

The one thing the police were after was documentary evidence but I managed to hide all my notes, as well as certain papers which would have got some of the Peshawar people into trouble had they been found, in a packet of 'Force'. This stood, like Poe's Purloined Letter, in full view on a table in our room, and though the police searchers went through everything else like a dose of salts, they ignored the innocent-looking packet of breakfast cereal. I carried it down in triumph to Bombay and was able to write and publish a report in consequence. This was

immediately declared forfeit to His Majesty and, though it was reissued in London later, for many years even I myself was unable to get a copy. But it was nice to think of King George having it.

Back in Bombay we had to face another problem. Shamrao had returned from England and sacrificed his higher education to work for the tribal people. My own inclination was in the same direction. But now, and specially since Gandhi's arrest and my own deportation, a good deal of pressure was put on me to enter politics. For example, at this time the Congress was planning to appoint a series of Presidents which would include members of every community, and Jamnalal Bajaj asked me if I would be willing to become Congress President when it was the turn of an Englishman to occupy that high office. It would not, he pointed out mean a great deal of work, for I would certainly be arrested and imprisoned within a week. I told him that I was willing and I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if I had gone through with it.

But when Shamrao and I talked it over, we came to the conclusion that this was not really our line. I have always been a little doubtful of the value of the intervention of European political amateurs in matters at which they are not expert. And, though I have always regretted that I did not go to jail, it was obvious that Government would not have given me that privilege, but would have deported me from the country, and that would merely have been a humiliation. And so we decided to keep to our original plan of going into the Gond country in the Central Provinces.

As I had been unable to get land in Betul and most of my friends were now in jail, I asked the Bishop of Nagpur (for it must be remembered I was still a loyal, if somewhat unorthodox, member of the Church of England) for his advice. This was Bishop Wood, a brave, strong man, with a sincere affection for the tribes and an equal devotion to the British Empire.

The bishop recommended Karanjia, a Gond village in the Mandla District, as particularly suitable for me. Of the last five Europeans to stay in this part of the world, he pointed out with relish, four had died within a year. This sounded very much what we wanted and so, on the 28th of January, 1932, a day which marks the central turning-point in my life, Shamrao and I started out in a bullock-cart, with

only a couple of hundred rupees between us, through the jungle into the Maikal Hills. Two days later we reached Karanjia, ahead of our baggage and supplies, tired and hungry. No one would come near us: we could not get so much as a pot of water. Shamrao went to try and make arrangements and I sat waiting by the roadside. I can still remember the appalling sense of desolation that swept over me then, the sudden fear that I had staked everything on the wrong horse.

We spent that night in a small, cold, dirty Forest Bungalow and the next morning went to visit the village. Karanjia consists of ten hamlets and the nearest had the attractive name of Tikera Tola (a *tikera* is a small hill standing by itself: ever since, even in Shillong, I have lived on *tikeras*). Here we found an impoverished but friendly Mussalman who had married a Gond girl and adopted the tribal way of life. He agreed to rent us, for three rupees a month, a small shed in which he kept his goats, and gave us the use of a veranda near by for a kitchen. The bargain struck, he turned out the goats, had the hut washed with cowdung, warm piles of straw were heaped on the floor, a small hearth was built on the veranda, someone brought wood and water, and that evening we were in our new home.

As I lay down to sleep on that mud floor the doubts and fears of the previous day vanished, never to return. In that little goat-shed I realized that I was caught, that never would I be able to escape the call of the primitive world; for better or worse I was committed. Yet at that moment, there was little that was beautiful, or exciting, or romantic: the Gonds of Tikera Tola seemed a little dull (no dances to welcome us), very poor, dirty, timid and shockingly diseased. But I had had the first glimpse of the 'elusive treasure' and I knew I must search till I found it, even if it took all my life.

In 1932, I decided, rather unwisely as it turned out, that I should go to England during the rains, partly to try to arouse people there to the seriousness of the Indian situation, and partly to see my mother who had been very ill. Shamrao and I went down to Bombay, and there I nearly abandoned the trip. My passport had expired and the Bombay Government refused to renew it except for a period of three weeks, which would just allow me to reach England, but not to return. So I gave up the idea of going, and announced the fact in the press.

There was an immediate outcry; the *Bombay Chronicle* devoted its morning leader to the subject, and was good enough to point out that it was men like me 'who enable Indians to believe that the British nation does not consist entirely of Imperialists, commercial exploiters, swashbuckling special correspondents. They are the one link that holds the attenuated chain of Indo-British relations together'.

Soon afterwards, I received a friendly letter from the Chief Passport Officer, asking me to go and see him, which I did. This official explained that even if he renewed my passport for five years, Government could always cancel it at any moment, but that actually his own refusal to extend it for a longer period was due to purely technical reasons, and he saw no reason why I should have any difficulty in getting it renewed for the full period after I had reached England.

I was much simpler then than I am now. I should, of course, have seen very clearly . . . that Government was only anxious to get me out of India without a press agitation. But I was really keen to visit England, and after arranging that Shamrao should go for medical training at the Tirupattur Ashram, I said goodbye to him and left Bombay.

I had an interesting journey across Europe, making contact with the pro-Indian groups in Italy, Switzerland and France. I addressed many . . . meetings [in London] and had a number of interviews with members of Government, among them Lord Irwin, as he then was. I got to know the Lord Chancellor, Lord Sankey, quite well, and among my trophies is a copy of *The Spirit of Man*, in which he marked his favourite passages. But Sir Samuel Hoare (later Lord Templewood), who was then Secretary of State for India, refused to see me on the ground that I had behaved 'in an indiscreet way' and that 'it would not be appropriate that he should receive me' at the India Office. In fact, when I went to see Lord Irwin he began by saying, 'In loyalty to my colleagues, I must tell you that the Secretary of State for India has the lowest possible opinion of you. But having said this, let us talk as friends.'

Sir Samuel showed his displeasure in a very practical way. I applied for a renewal of my passport immediately, getting George Lansbury to sign my application, but a week later I received the following letter:

The Chief Passport Officer presents his compliments to the Reverend H.V.H. Elwin and, with reference to his application for the renewal of his

passport, begs to inform him in accordance with a request made by the Secretary of State for India that he cannot be granted passport facilities for entry into India.

If Mr Elwin desires his passport to be renewed this will be done but the passport will have to be endorsed as not valid for India.

'This document', I wrote shortly afterwards, 'was one of the most shattering I have ever received, and yet I am glad I had it, for it revealed to me, as nothing else could have done, something of the helplessness of being a political outcaste, a condition into which so many thousands of people have been thrown both by British imperialism and by the dictatorships of the last decade.

But I had a few friends, and some of them, working behind the scenes, were able ultimately to put enough pressure on the India Office officials to get them to consent to allow me to return to India, provided that I signed an undertaking:

That I would confine myself entirely to work among the Gonds;
take no part in civil disobedience or any other political movement;
refrain, as far as possible, from associating with any persons engaged in political agitation;
refrain from writing articles against the Government; and
would observe the undertaking in the spirit as well as the letter.

Here was another crisis. C.F. Andrews thought I should not sign; others thought I should. Krishna Menon, later Defence Minister of India, was very helpful. I myself had no doubt of my duty. I had started my tribal work and I must go on with it. I signed, and caught the first available boat for India. When they heard about it later, both Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj approved of my decision and, looking back, I have no doubt it was right.

But it meant, of course, the end of my active political interests; it meant some misunderstanding, much isolation—for I was cut off from everyone. But it actually worked out very well. Sir Francis Younghusband remarked, 'I will always be grateful to Sam Hoare for one thing at least, that he forced Elwin from politics to poetry.'

I was not, however, isolated entirely from Bapu and continued to correspond with him, even when he was in jail. I have a packet of precious letters in his own hand—the quaint little home-made envelopes, the letters on tiny scraps of paper.

During the forties my links with Gandhi weakened. My closest friends among his followers, Jamnalal Bajaj and Mahadev Desai, died. With some of the others (except for his secretary Pyarelal) I found myself a little out of sympathy. For Gandhi my affection never wavered, but I allowed the differences between us to keep me away from him. I suffered a great disillusion when I discovered that the khadi programme was not suitable for our tribes. I have always been a strong supporter of handloom weaving, but spinning, for very poor people and in places where cotton did not grow, seemed to me artificial and uneconomic.

Gandhi's emphatic views on Prohibition (which I considered damaging to the tribes), his philosophy of sex-relations, especially as exaggerated by some of his followers (which I considered damaging to everybody), and what seemed to me a certain distortion of values—the excessive emphasis on diet, for example, further separated me from him. Today I feel very sorry about this, for it was in his last years that Gandhi reached his highest stature and I deprived myself of the warmth of his affection and the strength he would have given me during a difficult period. But it was a feeling about Truth that kept me from going to see him and from this point of view my instinct was right.

Bishops and Bayonets

During the next few years I moved slowly, but inevitably, away from the Church into a life of religious and intellectual freedom. The process was difficult and painful, for in the beginning I was intensely devoted to the Christian religion and to its expression in Anglo-Catholicism. I always dislike hurting people and unfortunately the controversies in which I was involved gave pain to my family and to many of my older friends.

There were two main points on which I came into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. The first was concerned with the Christian's part in politics, the second with his attitude to the non-Christian. My view was that it was quite untrue, as so many of the clergy and officials used to say at this time, that 'Christianity had nothing to do with politics'. I insisted, as Gandhi insisted, that 'religion' had an

important place in political life and that the Christian community not only had a right but a duty to bring its message and spirit into public affairs.

In November 1935, I finally wrote to the Metropolitan of Calcutta:

I am writing formally to announce to you my decision to be no longer a member of the Church of England either as a priest or a communicant.... I leave the Church of my baptism without a trace of bitterness and hostility, with nothing but love and reverence for the great tradition in which I have grown up. But it will be dishonest for me to remain longer.

My first conflict with the Church authorities was over politics. Presently this conflict resolved itself, for as I became more and more engrossed in literary and scientific work, I had less and less to do with politics, though my opinions remained the same. But a deeper issue remained and continues to this day, for the problem of religious conversion or cultural change is as interesting to the anthropologist as to the priest.

No one can withhold admiration from the Christian missionaries. They have brought to India the spirit of adventure and dedication. Hundreds of them have gone to live in the remotest places, denying themselves the comforts and amenities of life for many years. They have been the pioneers in the treatment of leprosy, championed the underdog, befriended the untouchables and taken a leading part in sponsoring the cause of the tribal people. They have done much for the languages of India, especially the tribal languages. In the fields of education and medicine their work has been distinguished by professional competence and human affection for children and the sick.

My own collision with the missionary movement did not depend on my estimate of the value of its work, but it went very far back to temperamental and intellectual attitudes of my Oxford days.

About half-way through my time there the influence of the mystical literature which I was then studying so eagerly began to make itself felt, and I began to think of religion not as a matter of saving yourself or your neighbour from sin and damnation or converting him to your own theological opinions, but as the quest of the soul for spiritual realities. The mystics have always been notoriously lukewarm about missions, and imperceptibly this attitude began to influence me, so that by the time

I had left Oxford I was no longer interpreting my religion in terms of converting other people to it at all.

My experience in Gandhi's ashram made it impossible to believe in an exclusive form of Christianity and, whatever broadminded people may say, once you take the exclusiveness out of Christianity a great deal has to go with it. After several years of painful struggle about the relations of Church and State on one side and my own theological beliefs on the other, everything suddenly and quite naturally fell away from me and I was free. It was a dramatic conversion, but in reverse. It was such a great liberation, bringing so much freedom, that I look back to that moment with the greatest happiness and without a moment of regret.

Dear as the Moon

It is easy to find the position of the little village of Karanjia even on a map of the world. Trace the course of the great Narbada river from its mouth on the west coast to its sacred source amid the eastern spurs of the Satpura Hills. Go a hair's breadth from its tail and there is Karanjia.

Here above the village where we had our original shed was a little hill, a *tikera,* overlooking the Pilgrim's Way that goes up to Amarkantak, eleven miles distant, where the Narbada rises, and on it we built the small huts of mud, bamboo and thatch which constituted the 'ashram'. In those early days all round us lay the vast mysterious forest, whose silence was broken at night only by the roar of the tiger or the high melancholy call of the deer.

The bulk of the people round us were Gonds, a great tribe, over three million in number, who are distributed all over central India. They will be found in the remote and malaria-smitten wilds of Chhindwara, by the wooded rivers of Betul, among the lovely hills of Seoni where Kipling's Mowgli hunted with the wolf-pack, in the great evergreen sal forests of Balaghat, in their ancient kingdom of Chanda, in Bastar and Andhra, and amidst the spurs of the sacred Maikal Hills.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century they had split up into a number of wild and warlike groups, making a living by plundering caravans and raiding the smaller towns from their mountain strongholds. Under British rule they grew pacific and settled on the land and took to their present occupation of farming. But now they suffered oppression and exploitation, for there soon came merchants and liquor-venders, cajoling, tricking, swindling them in their ignorance and simplicity until bit by bit their broad acres dwindled and they sank into the poverty in which many of them still live today. This poverty was not only material; at the same time there came a poverty of culture. For this reason it is not easy to speak of the culture of the Gonds, for it varies greatly from area to area and what there is today is only a shadow of what must once have been. The Gonds have few arts or crafts, they do not weave and only rarely carve in wood. Their pots and their baskets are usually made for them by others. They have adopted to a considerable degree the religion of their Hindu neighbours. Their language, which is a Dravidian tongue, is now spoken by less than half their people.

Gond poetry is simple and symbolic, free of all literary conventions and allusions. It is a poetry of earth and sky, of forest, hill and river, of the changing seasons and the varied passions of men, a poetry of love, naked and unashamed, unchecked by any inhibition or restraint. The bulk of the poems are songs of the dance and the most poetic of them are perhaps the songs of the great Karma dance which is common to many of the primitive tribes of central India. This dance symbolizes the growth of the green branches of the forest in the spring; sometimes a tree is set up in the village and the people dance round it.

I have said that it is not easy to speak of a culture of the Gonds as they are today. And yet what is culture? Is it not something more than art, religion, language, tradition? There is a very true culture that depends mainly on character, and in this sense the Gonds are a highly cultured people. They have royal blood in their veins, and even the poorest and simplest of them has a strength of purpose, a dignity, a redeeming sense of humour, and a courage in face of the disasters of life that anyone may envy. The honest peasant in his field, the devotee of Mother Earth, drawing his strength from the elemental forces of Nature, is in this sense as truly cultured as the most sophisticated intellectual.

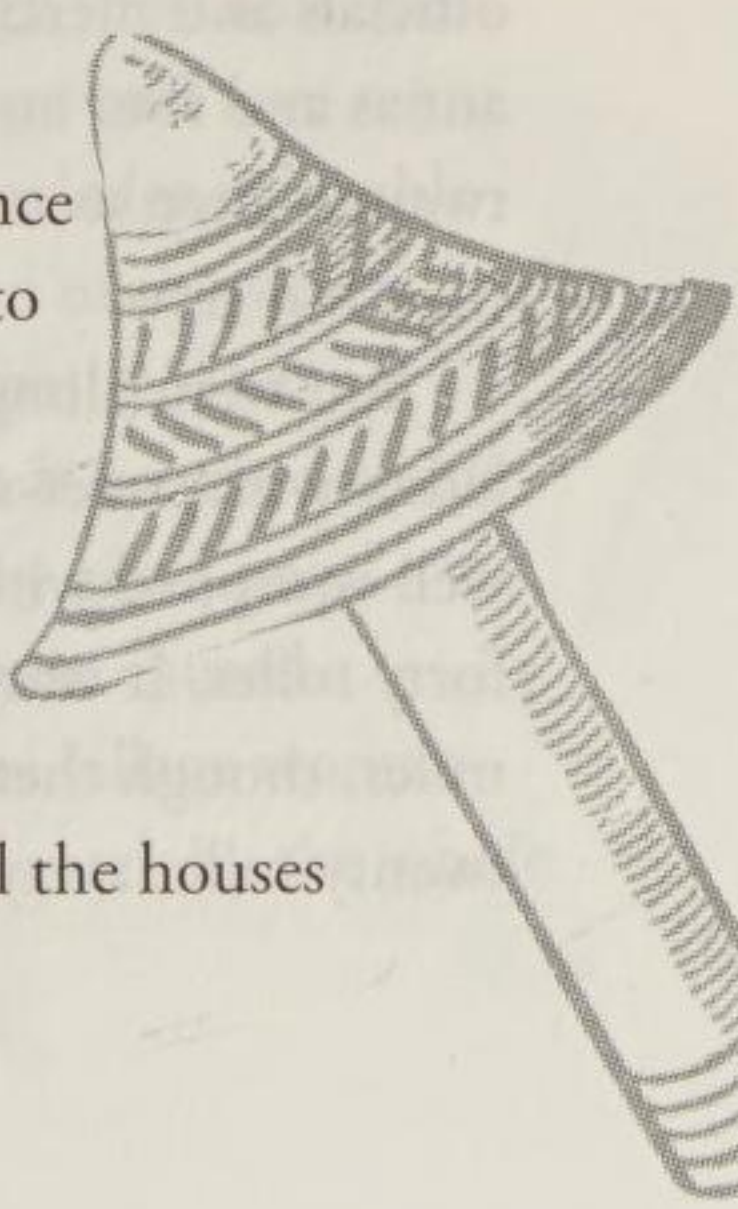
Besides the Gonds we had the Pardhans, the charming and romantic minstrels who have preserved the Gond epics, and the wilder Baigas and

Agarias. None of those living in our neighbourhood were what tourists call colourful. They had all lost their own language. As compared with the people of eastern India, one would not call them tribal at all. Moreover, the population of Karanjia and some of the neighbouring villages was very mixed. There were Hindus of various castes, and even a few Mohammedans, and this meant that from the very beginning we did not take an exclusive interest in the tribes but were concerned with everybody who was poor or exploited.

As I have already suggested, our plan was to build up a small settlement to help the people and to base our policy and way of life on a mixture of Franciscan and Gandhian ideas. We gradually recruited a small body of workers which included two or three Christians, a Mohammedan, some Hindus and a few of the local tribal people. The idea was that each member should have complete freedom to follow his own religion—in those days we thought very much in religious terms—and that we should have regular prayers based on the Sabarmati model. We organized ourselves into a small society, which we first called the Gond Seva Mandal. In 1949 we reorganized ourselves as the Tribal Welfare and Research Unit (TWARU).

The leading spirit of this little company was Shamrao, who in Karanjia became an entirely new person. He has always had an extraordinary warmth and humanity about him, and within a very short time of our arrival in Karanjia he had established himself as the Chhota Bhai, the little brother of the people, and as their guide, philosopher and friend. It soon became the custom for any tribesman who was in trouble to 'go to Chhota Bhai' for help. He is always accessible and in Karanjia used to be compared to a Hindu widow (old style) at the beck and call of everyone who wanted him, no task being too small, too humble or too unpleasant.

In the last eight years, he and his wife Kusum have carried on, with very little money and every circumstance of discouragement, by themselves but have continued to bring comfort and succour to hundreds of the poorest people. As someone said of Charles Lamb, Shamrao 'is only at ease in the old arms of humanity'.



The ashram looked exactly like part of the village which lay around and below it, for it was our policy from the first to build everything in the Gond style. All the houses

were of mud and thatch, the walls covered with Gond decorations, and there was no furniture which could not be matched in the village itself. At the same time, the ashram was different, in that, it attempted to demonstrate what a village might be like. The huts were clean and well-ventilated, everywhere there were flowers and fruit trees, proper houses for poultry and cattle, and pits for refuse and manure. The Gond visitor, therefore, found himself perfectly at home, and yet at the same time, even without a word being spoken, had the chance to learn something that he could take back to his own village.

To enter the settlement there was a long flight of steps which led you first to the little mud Chapel of St Francis, which was used by the Christian members. For this we had a fairly large court surrounded by a bamboo wall plastered with mud, and the chapel was in the middle of it, a little building rather like a Gond shrine. In front were some absurd rooms, in which I was just able to stand up, where we kept our books and spent most of our time. Outside the chapel was a flagstaff (essential to any place of worship in the Gondwana) bearing a saffron flag, which was fitted into a cowdunged platform on which grew the sacred basil tree. All round the courtyard we planted flowers in memory of St Francis's wish that gardens should be made that all who saw them should remember the Eternal Beauty. The tribal people are very fond of flowers and I have always done what I could to encourage them. In front of the whole building was a flat space on the edge of the hill, where the morning and evening prayers were held, and from here there was a wonderful view of forest, valley and hills.

The chapel and compound cost us a hundred rupees to build. At that time wages were two-and-a-half annas a day for women and three-and-a-half annas for men. We created a storm among the local officials and merchants by raising these to the pitiful rates of three annas and four annas. On the other hand, since paddy was at that time twenty-three seers to the rupee, an anna was worth a great deal more than it is now.

You went along the hill, which was sheltered by trees, many of them laden with sweet-smelling flowers, and reached the dispensary. This was well equipped with medicines, and villagers came to it from a radius of forty miles. It was the only dispensary along a main road of seventy-five miles, though there was a small Government dispensary across country, twenty miles away.

Next came a kitchen, built in Gond style round a small compound, dining-room and store-house, and a vegetable garden. Fruit trees were planted in the neighbourhood of all the buildings—mango, plantain, papaya, orange, fig, sour-lime, guava: we used to distribute seedlings and seed. Next door was a guest-house, where in-patients, pilgrims and other visitors could stay. Further along the hill was a small Museum, a very popular building which contained pictures, simple books, toy models and a Hornby train. Then came the largest of our establishments, the school and hostel. There was room for fifty boarders and a hundred others. The school was co-educational and a very fair proportion of girls attended. Here also was a carpenter's shop and a tailoring department. Beyond the school the hill became wild and thickly wooded, and a narrow path wound in and out of trees till it reached a gate beyond which no one might go without permission. This led to the Leper Refuge, where fifteen or sixteen lepers lived and received treatment in a beautiful little home, with a garden in which they took great pride.

This was the centre. Round it, hidden away in remote valleys or in the midst of the forest, there were eight branch ashrams within a radius of as many miles. Each of these had its resident worker, school, Hindi library and small dispensary, fitted with the simplest medicines. Once a week the workers gathered at Karanjia for conference. Model classes were given, and the plan of work for the coming week decided. This was necessary because the workers were themselves villagers without any very advanced education, and in this way they not only took their part in the fight against illiteracy, but also trained themselves to be leaders of their own people. There were between three and four hundred children in the schools, most of them belonging to the Gond and other tribes.

At this time we saw things very simply: we had to work for the health of the community; we had to see that there was enough food and that it was properly cooked; we had to help the people to get and save more money, and finally we had to give them sufficient knowledge to enable them to resist their exploiters and to widen their vision of the world.

Above all, we had to rouse the people from their apathy. The prevailing attitude was that 'God has made us poor: it is no good trying to be anything else'. In a nearby village there was a very good pond where the people got their water. But one year heavy rain caused a breach in its bank and the water ran out. After that the village women had to walk two miles to the nearest river. A few days' work by the whole

community could have repaired the pond and saved all the waste of time and energy. When we suggested it to them the Gonds said, 'We are poor men. What can we do?' In the end we had to mend the breach ourselves.

As time went on the people did become more alive to the possibility of prosperity and gradually a completely new spirit came to them. One day—but this was after Independence—a Gond woman walked into the dreaded police station and on being ordered out by the Sub-Inspector she said, 'But this is *our* police station, not yours. It belongs to the people.' And another day when a Brahmin Revenue official told one of the Gonds that it was useless to send his son to school, the Gond replied, 'Naturally you would think so, because you know that he would then get your job.'

I have described those early years at Karanjia in my *Leaves from the Jungle,* which originally appeared with a foreword by Romain Rolland, and was published by John Murray in 1936. It is not a book I have ever been very proud of, though it had a great success at the time and has recently been republished by the Oxford University Press. It does, however, give some picture of the strange, happy and exciting life we had during our first few years in the forest.

The Baiga, which Murrays published later, was rather strong meat for some of the Directors, especially for Lord Gorell, but he was always exceptionally nice to me about it.

In 1936, after I had begun to be interested in research, we moved twelve miles away to a new village.

Brass horse, made by Ghasia, of a type often placed in Muria shrines

At Sanhrwachhapar, which consisted of three hamlets in a great valley with a small river running through it, we had plenty of land, timber and bamboo. We laid out the settlement very carefully, building our own houses on the side of a hill with a sort of studio for myself, high up, where I was able to write in peace. Below was a large field where we held a weekly bazaar and to one side was the

school and hostel and, further down towards the river, a very beautiful little plateau where we built the Leper Home. Not far away we made a small village to accommodate members of the staff. We had no chapel in this new centre.

Here we were much more isolated than in Karanjia, though we did make our own road from the main highway which itself was out of action for about half the year. In two of our hamlets there were Gonds and Raj-Gonds and in the third was a community of what are now called Scheduled Caste people, the Meheras. We were nearer the Baigas and there were Agaria settlements all round us.

Here we came into much closer contact with problems of change and exploitation. We were on the fringe of the great forests and became more aware than ever of the great deprivation that the loss of their freedom meant to the people. They love the forest with a passionate devotion. It is to them, 'the forest of joy', 'the forest of sweet desire'. It is the scene of the early romances of their childhood, the arena in which they engage upon their most heroic struggles with nature. The Baigas regard themselves as the true *Pashupati,* the Lords of all wild animals; the magical protection of the forest is their charge; they have derived their material sustenance from it for hundreds of years. The reservation of vast tracts of forests, inevitable as it was, was therefore a very serious blow to the tribesman. He was forbidden to practise his traditional methods of cultivation. He was ordered to remain in one village and not to wander from place to place. When he had cattle he was kept in a state of continual anxiety for fear they should stray over the boundary and render him liable to what were for him heavy fines. If he was a Forest Villager he became liable at any moment to be called to work for the Forest Department. If he lived elsewhere he was forced to obtain a licence for almost every kind of forest produce. At every turn the Forest Laws cut across his life, limiting, frustrating, destroying his self-confidence. During the year 1933–4 there were 27,000 forest offences registered in the Central Provinces and Berar and probably ten times as many unwhipp'd of justice.

The Meheras and even the Gonds of this area were rather inclined to litigation and we saw a great deal of the burden which police and court investigations placed upon them, as well as the physical distress and nervous exhaustion of long journeys to the distant courts, the demoralising contact of lawyers, lawyer's touts and petition-writers, and

the bewilderment of dealing with laws they did not understand and which often ran counter to their own traditions. On one occasion we estimated that in a fairly simple registration case the applicant and four witnesses had to travel an aggregate of 3700 miles before their business was finished.

The people at Sanhrwachhapar were a long way from shops, and commercial exploitation did not press on them very heavily. But in a remote area like this there was a lot of intimidation by the more sophisticated villagers, some of whom impersonated police or revenue officials and took money from the more simple.

But perhaps the most impoverishing factor for the lives of both the Gonds and the low-caste Hindus of this neighbourhood came not from outside but from movements for reform.

At that time there was an organization called the Raj-Gond Kshattriya Surajwansi Maha Sabha (to give it its full name) of Seoni and Mandla which had an ambitious programme of cultural change. Its propagandists went far and wide forbidding the Gonds to eat beef or even to yoke the cow to the plough, to abstain from pork and poultry, to avoid alcohol, and to prevent their women from dancing. When we took a party of Gond boys to demonstrate tribal dances at the Tripuri Congress in 1939, the Sabha wrote to Gandhi threatening to perform satyagraha if these children were permitted to give their show.

In Mandla a Gond reformer set up his 'court' near Dindori. At the end of 1936 he began to tour the district. He was accompanied by three or four 'chaprasis'—one of them was a hard-drinking Mussalman adventurer—and carried some large books, Hindu scriptures which he apparently had not studied. The party went from village to village holding meetings. The reformer stated that he had the authority of Government behind him and that failure to obey his orders would be punished by the police. He promulgated what he called the new Gond religion. He pointed out that the old life of the Gonds was altogether bad and caused them to be despised by their Hindu neighbours. Everything, therefore, that the Hindus despised must be abandoned. The great Karma dance, the one surviving instrument of Gond culture in that area, must stop. Men and women must not sing the 'immoral' Dadaria (the beautiful forest-songs) together. Pigs and chickens, the only tax-free domestic animals, must be destroyed—and an already insufficient diet be still further impoverished. The Gonds must become teetotal. Women should be put in purdah. The rules of untouchability

must be strictly observed. Children must be married young in Hindu fashion. Cows must be honoured and not yoked to the plough.

The movement spread rapidly through the district, and hundreds of Gonds donned the sacred thread and paid a four-anna subscription to the reformer. An unspeakable drabness settled down on the reformed villages. A 'Shiv-raj' was established at which the great dancer Natarajan would have shuddered.

Within two years, however, this reformer had been arrested and imprisoned on a charge of cheating, and many villages returned—though somewhat half-heartedly—to their old customs. But other propagandists are constantly on the move; it is an easy way of making money to improve your fellows; and the beautiful song and dance of the eastern Gond districts is probably doomed to ultimate extinction because of the pathetic notion that to abandon it is to rise in the social scale.

Later, I saw similar movements in Bastar, a few external and imposed, others springing up spontaneously. There had been spasmodic attempts from time to time on the part of Hindu State officials to check beef-eating; occasionally a social worker wandered across the border from Chanda or Jeypore and was scandalized at the freedom, the natural happiness, the lack of clothing of the Bastar tribesmen, and of course the simple and natural love-life of the Muria ghotul.

In the latter part of our time at Sanhrwachhapar I found myself on more friendly terms with some of the liberal high officials of the local Government; I was relieved of police surveillance, and appointed an Honorary Magistrate.

We stayed at Sanhrwachhapar for four years and then moved again to our final home at Patangarh, partly on grounds of health, partly because I needed a place from which it would be easy to travel to other parts of tribal India and partly because we just liked Patangarh better.

Patangarh was a charming village on an abrupt hill in the midst of a wide clearing in the mountains. On every side were the hills, piled up on one another, of the Maikal Range. In the foreground was the magnificent symmetry of the Lingo mountain. The sacred Narbada was only half a mile away and we could see its bright waters. A fresh wind was always blowing. Patangarh was at least five degrees cooler than Sanhrwachhapar or Karanjia. Not only was the village beautiful, but its inhabitants were more delightful, more amusing, more friendly than

any others. Most of our neighbours were Pardhans, the gay, romantic minstrels of the Gonds. 'Phulmat of the Hills' was a Pardhan.

At Patangarh we opened a dispensary, school, shop, guest-house and our main 'offices', continuing a school, the leper home, a small dispensary, the guest-house, and the bazaar at Sanhrwachhapar for some years. Gradually, however, we brought everything over to Patangarh and established the Leper Home on a flat-topped hill opposite ours.

The establishment of the new centre was rather complicated. The landlord first invited us to come, then gave us a notice to quit, then begged us to stay after all. An odd creature. Then we chose a really lovely site for the ashram round a group of ancient trees, and we started to build. But it turned out that one of the trees was the home of Thakur Deo, and another the haunt of the village Mother-goddess, for an unprecedented series of whirlwinds (which are evil spirits throwing their weight about) swept across our hill, and some of the leading villagers had dreams of the goddess, distracted, her hair dishevelled, tears pouring down her face, rushing wildly to and fro as our buildings were erected.

So we picked the houses up bodily and put them elsewhere, in a site commanding equally lovely views, but without the trees. Here too we bumped into a ghost, but we felt we had paid our tribute to local sentiment and could hardly be expected to move again.

In order to build at Patangarh we carried most of the houses at Sanhrwachhapar over to the new village. This saved us a lot of expense, for we were able to use all the timber and most of the bamboo walls, though, of course, we had to sacrifice the thatch. As I have said, this is the great advantage of living in mud huts.

I was in central India all through the Second World War.

The attitude of the Gonds and Baigas to the war was interesting. An old woman put it very well. 'This,' she said, 'is how God equalizes things. Our sons and daughters die young, of hunger or disease or the attacks of wild beasts. The sons and daughters of the English could grow old in comfort and happiness. But God sends madness upon them, and they destroy each other, and so in the end their great knowledge and their religion is useless and we are all the same.'

Some of the tribesmen, always excited by a quarrel, were anxious to help. A party of Baigas came one day with a bundle of bows and arrows which they wanted me to forward to the Government to aid in the war. When I told them that modern battles were no longer fought with these

weapons they were much concerned. 'But if they use guns, people will really get killed,' they said. Some Gonds brought their old swords. A Baiga magician made what is called a *thua*—an essay in sympathetic magic. He buried a thorn-bush in the ground by a river and placed a heavy stone upon it. The thorn-bush represented Hitler and the hole in the ground his grave; the stone was to prevent him ever rising again. And once when I was going away somewhere, and a story went round that I was going to the war, I was seen off by a crowd of people shouting what they expected me to do to Hitler's sisters and aunts, daughters and other female relations.

I kept Patangarh as headquarters until I went to NEFA, even during the period when I was working in the Department of Anthropology. It was, and still is, a village of great fascination, and I shall always miss it and its people. So will my wife Lila, for she was born there.

I specially miss our main house, to the construction of which I gave a great deal of attention. It was a large mud building with a thatched roof and I loved making it, for it had some special features. It had no outer door, though for the inner rooms I had some old carved Baiga doors that were most ornamental. This was a tribute to our tribal friends—you could not have a house like this in a town—and they could and did come in to see us at any hour of the day or night. Then the entire building was a sort of museum which had things collected from all over India in cases set in the very thick walls. And the building itself was an example of the local tribal art.

The chief surviving art of the Gonds and Pardhans of this part of India was to sculpt on the mud walls of their houses and you can still see many tiny hovels, devoid of every dignity save cleanliness, decorated with charming murals. We decided, therefore, to have all the walls of our own house decorated in this way. It was a big job and took nearly six months, for most of the artists were elderly women who had lots of other things to do, and tribal artists, like artists everywhere, are sensitive and temperamental and, unlike those elsewhere, had no tradition of doing anything for show or for pay.

Soon the walls were covered with tribal heroes, birds, animals, scorpions, mountains, dancers, and deer with enormously long legs to symbolize their speed. In the dispensary, which formed part of the building, were representations of tribal medicine-men doing their stuff, and in contrast a model of the doctor with his hypodermic. In a bathroom were excellent mud water-girls, three feet high, with pots on their heads and a well at their feet.

This Gond art is characterized by symbolism and by a very simplified method of representation: a bird may be shown by its wings, a dancer by his legs. And the Gonds seem to have little idea of symmetry or straight lines. When I raised this point with one of them, she replied, 'But trees in the forest do not stand up straight, nor do the branches extend equally on either side. The pattern on the wall is like the forest.' And so in many cases it was, and the effect was not unpleasing.

The walls of the house did not go up to the roof, and the artists wanted to put a sort of frieze right round the top. This was great fun. Everybody loved modelling mud animals and birds. A little boy of about twelve arrived one morning and revealed remarkable powers of imagination; he made a splendid elephant with a crown on its head and a howdah on its back, a Ganpati which might shock an orthodox iconographer but which was interesting as showing the tribal conception of a Hindu deity, a most elegant camel, a mud motor-car, a tiger with a curling tail, birds so realistic that they looked as if they might fly into the air—and all in the clumsy medium of wet mud mixed with millet chaff.

Around this house and the other houses in which we lived there was a strong atmosphere of affection, not only on our side but also from the people who crowded in at all hours of the day and night in a completely natural and informal way as if the place was their own, as indeed it was. Outside, there was jealousy and even hatred, for some officials and other non-tribals resented the way that anyone could come to us;

they felt that we had let civilization down by being too accessible and thus making it more difficult for them to maintain their own barriers of superiority. But this was outside. Inside our walls we could forget everything in the warmth and simplicity of our tribal friends.

We often gave parties, which usually ended in a dance, and what was more important we were given parties in return. In the Mandla villages these were quite elaborate affairs—our hosts would clean their houses and spend all day preparing food, which was generally very tasty. When the time for supper came, a number of people would arrive to escort us. The strongest youth present would hoist me on his back, another would pick up Shamrao, and then, preceded by women singing songs of welcome, we would be carried to our host's house. In NEFA too, the hospitality of the villagers was generally almost over-whelming and I sometimes had to take lunch in half a dozen houses, for none of the leading people of a village liked to be left out. I have had strange dishes on some of these consoling occasions—roasted rats and mice in the Bondo hills; chutneys of red ants among the Murias; large white palm-tree grubs fried in their own fat, a little too rich, from the Marias; a wonderful pilaff of dog's meat and mountain rice from the Kabui Nagas.

To accept tribal hospitality (provided it is not overdone) is a very good thing. It breaks the one-sided patronage of charity, the condescension of benevolence.

When you reach the point that people want to do things for you and are proud to do so rather than always being on the receiving end, you have made a big step forward. The goodness and kindness of my tribal friends, especially when I was ill, was, both in central India and on the frontier, touching and inspiring. Once in Patangarh I developed a very large septic boil which I attempted to cure by some antibiotic tablets from our dispensary. Unfortunately, these had got mixed up with tablets of Milk of Magnesia which they resembled in size, so they did not do very much good and I got steadily worse, until I was in acute pain and fever. It was the height of the rains, no motor transport was possible and I had to be carried thirty-two miles to a place where I could get a car to take me another ninety miles to the nearest hospital. I shall never forget the cheer and tenderness of the men who carried me in a sort of litter through pouring rain and partly by night. We had to cross flooded rivers into which my bearers plunged up to the neck, raising my litter above

their heads to keep me dry. When I ultimately reached the hospital I was told that if I had delayed even a few hours I should have developed generalized blood-poisoning, but an immediate operation put me right. Yet it was my tribal friends who saved me.

I have said little about individual tribal friends. This I have done deliberately, partly because it does not do to have favourites (particularly among children) in a village and partly because in tribal society I found an entirely new kind of relationship with people. You escape from the normal individualism, the possessiveness and jealousies of sophisticated friendships into something broader and more universal.

At the same time, in the Mandla villages at least, there were alliances into which one entered. You took someone as your Mahaprasad (mine was Mahatu the Baiga priest) or your Sakhi (Panda Baba, of whom there is a lot in *Leaves from the Jungle*), had several Jawaras and so on. But Shamrao and I acquired so many of these that they did not disturb the general relationship: a whole village was our Sakhi or Jawara.

This is why I have felt it better (as always searching for some sort of symbol) to write about the Saoras in general rather than the great Chief of Sogeda or the Bondos as a whole rather than the entertaining Miliya.

In our earlier years in the village Shamrao and I had a common purse. We did not take any salary and foolishly made no kind of insurance for the future. We drew what was needed for our expenses and tried to live simply. Anything we received went into the common stock. For example, for five years I received a research grant from Merton College and, later, a grant from the Leverhulme Foundation. Later, in Shillong, I had my official honorarium.

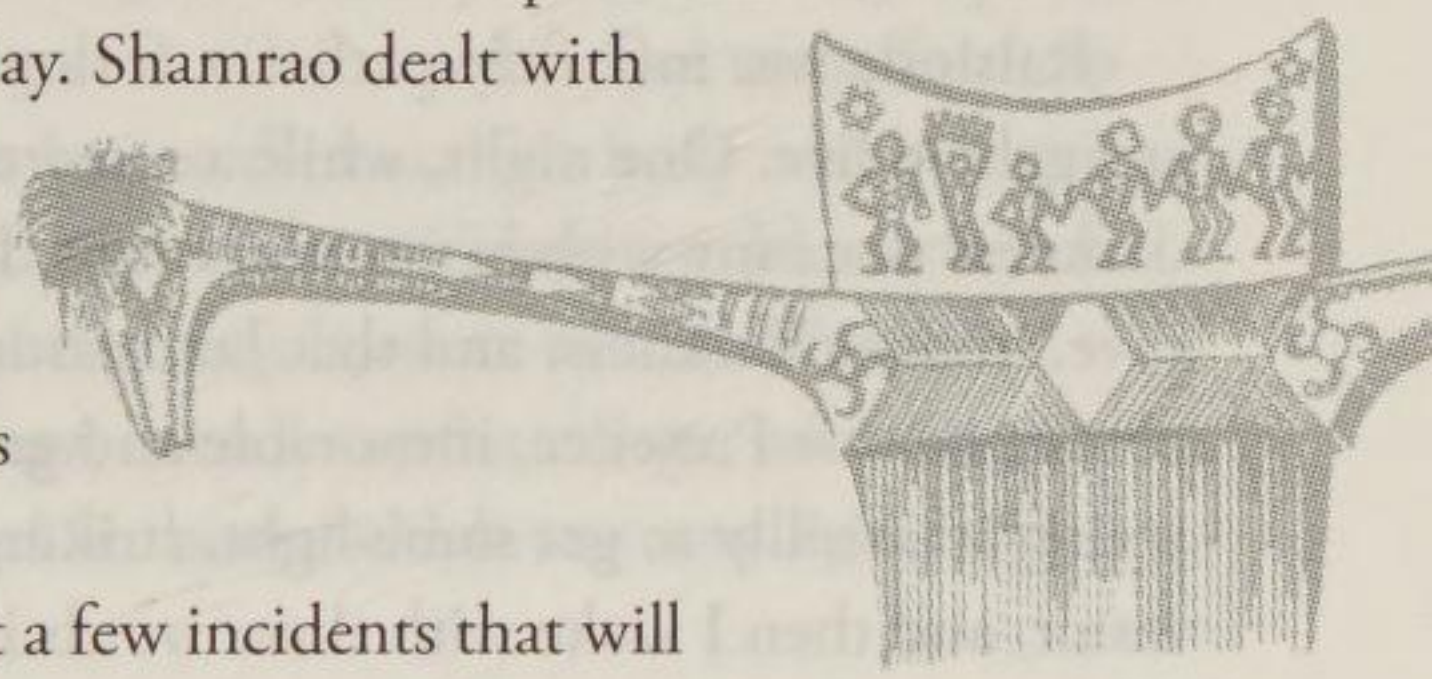
Although friends were very generous, finance was always a problem. I used to go out, generally in the rains, to hold meetings to try to raise money for the work and for a number of years we had an annual meeting in Bombay where people showed a great deal of interest in tribal matters. Without the help of the great Tata Trusts we could not have carried on. J.R.D. and Mrs Tata have always been very good to us and Rustom Choksi, whose friendship is like a rock, and his sister Pipsy Wadia, were most faithful in their support. Later in this book I describe the part that J.P. Patel played in our lives.

When Victor Sassoon joined us he contributed very generously to our funds. But Victor, of course, gave much more than financial support. He

is a man who is equally at ease in the company of millionaires, dons or villagers and he was a wonderful success in all the tribal villages he visited and especially in Patangarh where we built a little cottage for him.

One result of my village experiences was that I developed a very strong sense of economy. For example, I still cannot bear to see water being wasted. For many years every drop of water I used had to be carried up a steep hill from a stream or well and now that I live in a world of taps I still do not like to turn them on fully or to allow the precious fluid to run away uselessly.

Short of writing a day-to-day diary, as I did in *Leaves from the Jungle,* it is impossible to give a proper account of the many years we spent in the Mandla villages. There is not a great deal of variety in village life and our days followed a general pattern, which was interrupted from time to time by strange or dramatic incidents. There were the sick who crowded our dispensary. There were the schools or, after we settled in Patangarh the school, for as Government began opening more schools, we thought it better to concentrate on one. There were the lepers who had to be provided for and cheered up. There was a host of problems and cases that poured in upon us every day. Shamrao dealt with most of the daily practical matters, and I spent a lot of my time writing. There were festivals, marriages and funerals to attend.



I can, therefore, only suggest a few incidents that will illustrate the kind of life we had.

On one of my Saora tours I had a strange and moving experience which, like many of my experiences, had a symbolic value out of all proportion to what actually happened.

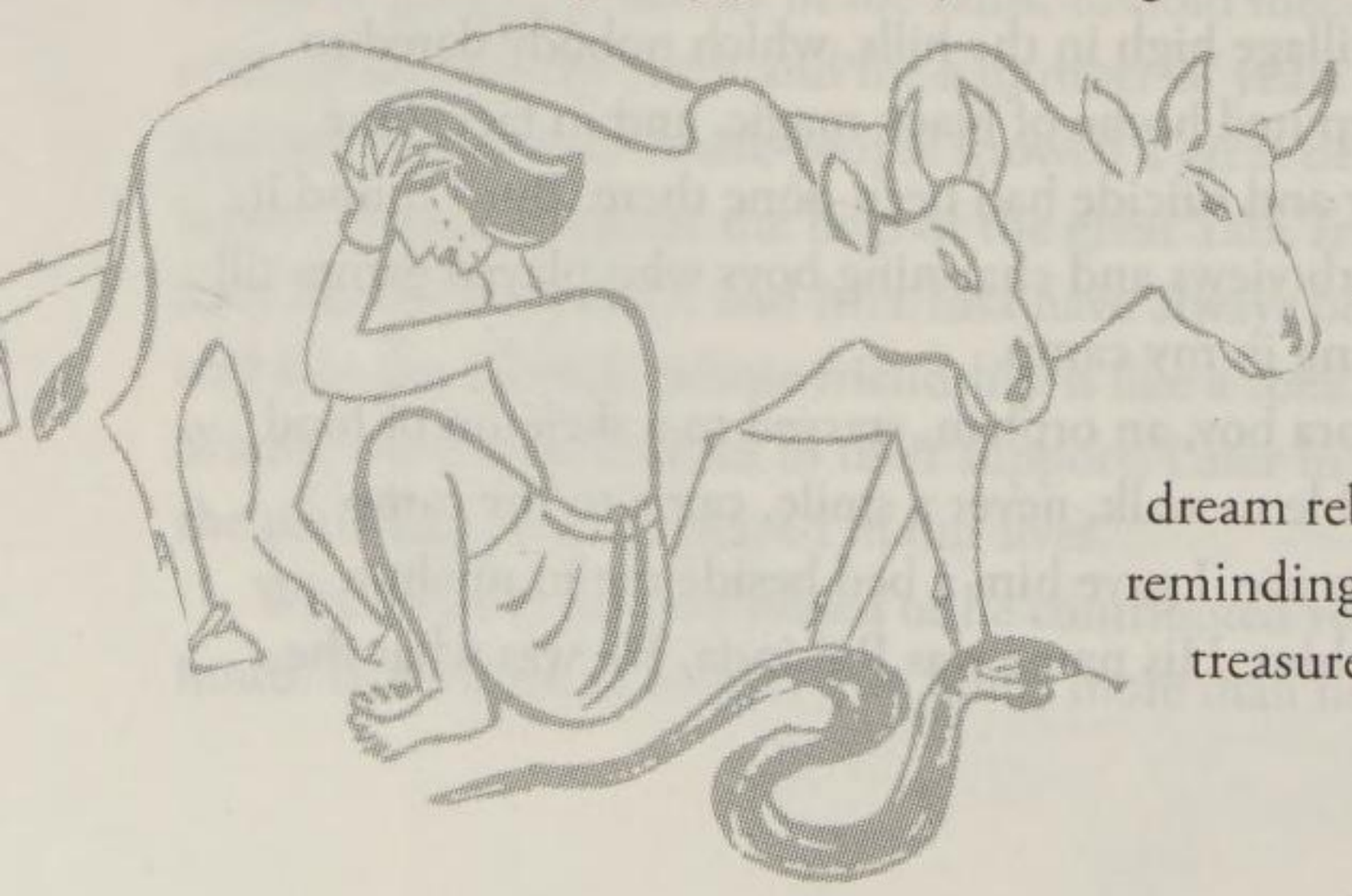
I was staying in a village high in the hills, which nobody dared to visit since it was the reputed home of black magic, and in fact some heavy deeds of murder and suicide had been done there. But I found it enchanting, with superb views and charming boys who played games till a late hour every evening in my camp.

One day a little Saora boy, an orphan, starved to a skeleton of food and affection, hardly able to walk, never a smile, came to my camp and attached himself to me. I gave him a bed beside me in my hut, and tried to look after him. His name was Raisinda. He was what the

Saoras call *kodajang*, legged like a crane, and was evidently suffering from pneumonia and probably other things as well. He was, in spite of his weakness, a most charming child with beautiful manners. Though he could hardly stand he used to fold up his bedding in the morning and after drinking tea he always wanted to wash the cup himself. He was so ill that he could not lie down for, when he did, he said that he felt as if ants were crawling into his ears. When he came he was making loud harsh noises whenever he breathed: I gave him some antibiotics and he got better. He was a true Saora, for every morning he used to send for palm wine and preferred drinking this to any food we could give him. He also insisted on being provided with the little cheroots called *pikas* to which all the members of his tribe are greatly attached. He was fond of sitting on my lap and, towards the end, when his mind was not very clear, used to call me mother. Almost the last thing he did when he was sitting with me was to fumble at my pocket to put a precious half-smoked cheroot into safe keeping. He did smile just twice before he died and at the end he passed away very peacefully in his sleep.

Raisinda was infinitely pathetic, forlorn and remote in his boyish struggle to live. One night, while a sorceress in a hut nearby made the darkness uncanny with her conjurations, I dreamt that I was in a great cave, in utter darkness, and that Jammasum (the Saora god of death) had come as a vast Presence, inexorable and grim, to carry off the boy. I was trying frantically to get some light, striking match after match with no result, and then I woke with these words in my mind, 'Love is the true weapon, love is the dress, love is my gold.'

That evening had come the news of the UNO debate on Korea and the threat to use the atom bomb—hence love as the true weapon. I had found that after giving part of my bedding to the boy, I was actually warmer than I had been before—hence love as the dress. And too I had been very worried about money, and my dream rebuked me for this, reminding me of the hidden treasure.



It was a strange thing how this dying child affected my staff and all of us, as well as the other villagers. It was beautiful to see how much tenderness he excited in everybody. I wrote at the time: 'When I ask myself what is the use of a life like his, and why it ever was, coming to the world to be hungry and lonely and then to die without being any use—as one would say—to society, I can see dimly that his suffering, which reflects surely a greater suffering, has hallowed many people and spoken to them.'

There were other symbolic incidents. One day, long ago, a dear old Hindu sadhu came to us in the last stages of sickness and old age. He died bravely, for he was a true sadhu, courteous and detached and unafraid. Nobody would go near him and we laid him out and washed him and finally took him to the pyre in a beautiful little glade in the forest where some of our lepers had been cremated. The red flames leaping up to the rising sun and the peaceful trees and mountains all round made a picture that was in contrast to the horrid reality of disease and misery of the previous night.

Another time a barber, suffering from a very advanced degree of syphilis and entirely alone except for a deformed father, came for help and we did what we could, but he too died and his body was in a quite shocking condition. Here again, none of the Gonds would touch the corpse, not because he was syphilitic but because he was a barber. So Shamrao and I, with two brave men from the village, who risked excommunication for it, carried his body, which was very light from near-starvation, to the grave.

It was humbling to reflect that, at so little cost to oneself, it was possible to give some comfort, and the effect of the smallest such actions makes one wonder why one ever does anything else. Shamrao once showed his true insight when he immediately recognized the Tightness of Blake's saying that, if we would do good, we must do it in minute and individual particulars.

When we were at Karanjia an elderly Pardhan who was suffering from leprosy in a very advanced form came to stay with us. Almost blind and hideously deformed, he could do nothing for himself. He had a young wife named Satula who became for us the symbol of all that was best in married life. She was outstandingly beautiful, graceful and charming, and many young men were anxious that she should divorce her husband and marry again. She could have had almost anyone she

wanted and escaped from a life that held nothing but horror and misery. Yet she remained with her old husband, tending him devotedly and giving him her love, until he died. By then she herself had developed the disease and after a few years followed him to the pyre.

My sister Eldyth came to stay with us in Patangarh for a few months just before the Second War. The people loved her and her little house was always crowded with visitors. I find it difficult to write about life in our village, and I will, therefore, give some extracts from letters she wrote at the time.

The Leper Home is close at hand and is a most beautiful place. Banana trees and flowers grow between the small white houses, which are very cosy, especially in the evenings with their little fires. There is the school and dispensary, where Shamrao stands radiating love and hope as he injects one after the other. They come crowding up on their poor swollen feet and as he talks to them and jokes with them, smiles split their distorted faces. The little leper children run to him, five tiny lovely children. A beautiful boy had just developed the disease and had his first injection while his father wept aloud. In such a place there is visible tragedy, but at least they are cared for, they have food and clothing, cows and doves and friends.

For all round us there is that flame of pain, that burns brightly in almost all whom we meet. Disease sunk in them in abysmal hopelessness, cold striking like a piercing arrow with a numbness that a strip of cotton cloth does little to cure; and hunger is a stalking horse with thin arms and legs and wasted bodies. One sees this in the bazaar which gathers all over the ashram hill: the women who are really young look old and wrinkled, almost all are thin. The 'stalls' are tiny little heaps of beans and chillies, a few dried fish', some sweets and tobacco, some bangles and strips of cloth. But for all that it is a very social occasion and people come from miles around to buy or sell and meet friends.

I long to be able to make you see this village and its poor but loving courteous villagers, who refuse to 'improve', but who lodge in your heart. To show you Verrier and Shamrao, with all that there is to discourage them, ceaselessly returning good for evil and dispensing friendship with both hands.

There were many sick: pneumonia had followed measles. Crowds came to the Dispensary. Shamrao gazing over a selection of patients, all

with strange and unknown diseases, cried 'I wish the masses didn't suffer so!' And how difficult to know what to do even when the disease was diagnosed. We did what we could. There was one family where everyone went sick. The father, a magician, went thin as a bone with a terrible cough. The elder boy, deaf and dumb, became jaundiced and faded to a skeleton. The lovely daughter of about fourteen developed heart trouble, the little boys got bad fever and terrible pustulated itch, and the baby, a plump and merry little fellow, with a piece of the backbone of a snake round his neck to protect him from ill, looked like a famine waif, pitiful beyond words. The poor mother was desperate, and went from magician to magician for help, instead of coming to us. We went to them, however, and found them all sitting in a little inner room filled with smoke from the open fire. The skeleton boy was dragged out into the light for us to see, but we could do nothing for him and could only feel glad when he died. The others responded to Shamrao's injections, except for the baby, who, in spite of tinned milk, was too weak to survive. They had been terribly poor and undernourished all their lives.

Another little baby had been ill a long time, indeed ever since he was born he had suffered. His head was so big and his body so small, and he had great brown eyes. When he wasn't with his mother he rode on the hip of his small uncle aged nine, and was often put down for a game of marbles when he would wail in a thin little voice. His father was away and we thought the baby dying, but he got back and the baby laughed for joy and held out his arms and was held by his father till they came to tell us 'The child is dead'. We rushed round to find them all desperately weeping beside the still body of the child. The women weep in the most beautiful way; it is almost like singing, and as they weep they compose the words.

His mother wept, 'My little son, because you were so delicate I held you always on my breast, but now I must lay you all alone on the cold earth. Before you came I was so ugly, but you came and made me a queen. Your throne was between my breasts, but now I must be as I was before.'

They wrapped him in white cloth, and his father, taking him in his arms, led a party down the hillside to the field. Only men go to funerals but they let me follow a little way off. We crouched in the field in silence while the grave was dug with a little cave to one side. The father laid his

child in this with most tender care, hovering over him till he felt sure the little body was comfortable, and then he covered his face. They all went to bathe ceremoniously at the well.

One day, startled by the boys' excited cries, we looked up to see, advancing over the plain like prehistoric monsters, twenty great elephants. They were journeying from Sarguja State to Tripuri for the Congress procession. We were all thrilled. Jai Gopal rushed to meet them crying to the mahout of the largest elephant, 'Here you are! Bara Bhai is here. Come along!' Verrier went out and invited them to spend the night in our village, which they did, spending the day eating large quantities of jungle rice laid in the heart of a ball of grass and ten great chapatis and ghee. How our peoples' mouths watered! All that food! People thronged the village and wherever the elephants went the entire Boarding School followed. At sunset the mahouts agreed to take us for a ride. I rode with the women on the Raja's elephant, a great beast nearly twelve feet high, and, with the rest of them laden with boys and villagers, we rode to the river two miles away and the huge creatures stood round drinking. Then we swayed back in the dark, all singing and piping, towering above the little huts The mahouts were wonderful old men and each elephant had a special name. At dawn they were gone, leaving a treasured memory in the minds of us all....

Anthropological committees are difficult if amusing. One night we had two Pardhans and a Panka to supper. They started off well with a fund of information that was irrelevant but interesting enough to make Verrier want to start a book on the subject. Brought back to the point, the small baby of the chief spokeswoman started to cry and she had to lie flat on the floor till he was soothed. The father, a bit of a wag, with a long piece of cloth wound round his face and head, sat sideways on a deck-chair commenting on the repast which he ate with relish.' How much food you eat!' We gave them some coffee at the end to see how they liked it, and their faces were a study.

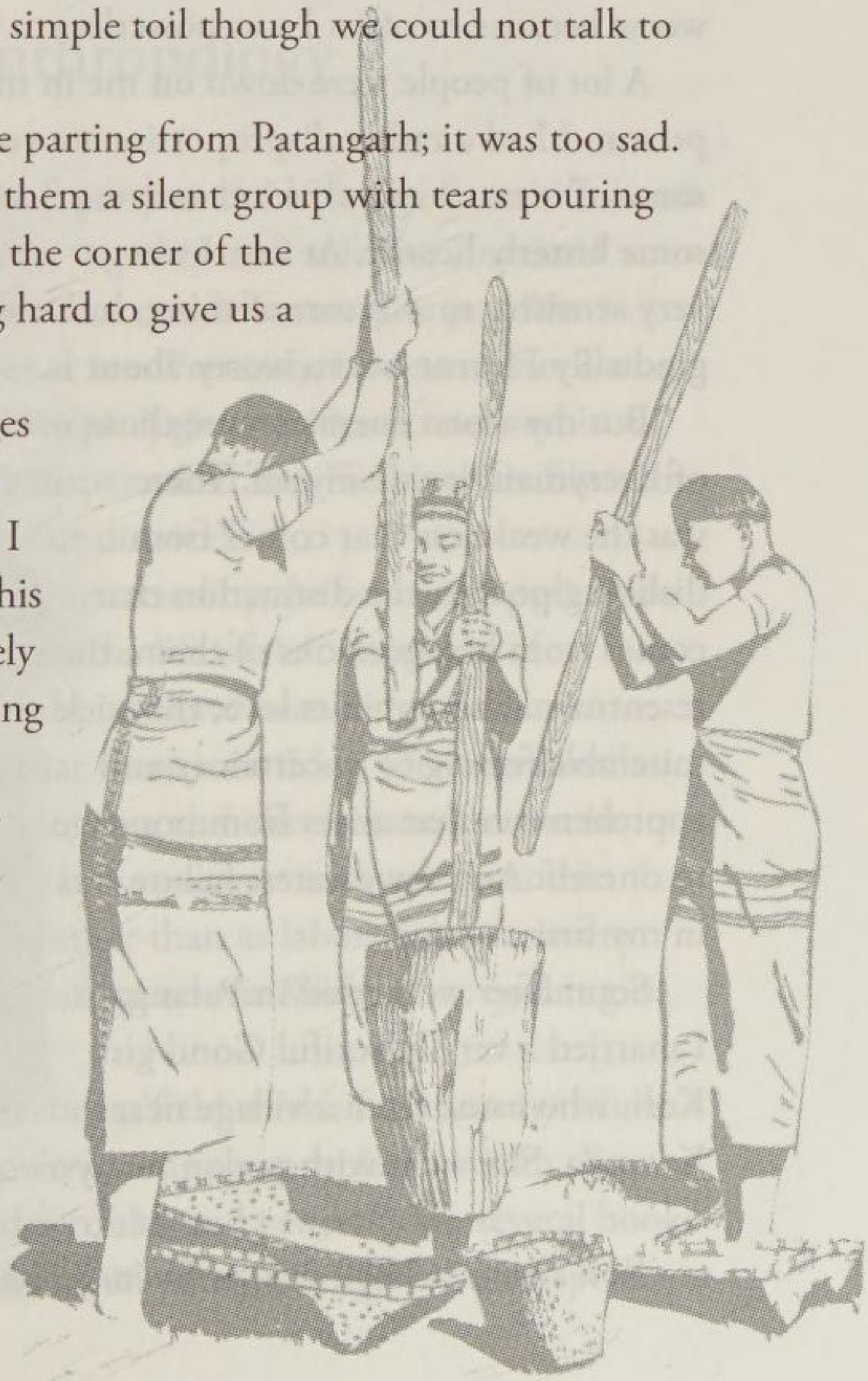
'After feeding us so well, you give us this bitter stuff to spoil it all,' he cried, but with looks of anguish he drank it.

It is rather terrible to see these people look at food. Whenever we gave the lepers a goat, while it was being cut up they used to gaze with devouring looks upon each piece. It comes from generations of hunger. We asked the boys what they would like for a farewell feast. 'Potatoes and chapatis' they said. That was all they asked.

Little pictures of village life stand out vividly. I remember walking through the village at Sanhrwachhapar on the way that leads down to the well. At the turn on the path you come to a great tree in which were dozens of green pigeons, with wings of mauve and green and feathers of bright yellow and dove-grey. At the top of the hill were two or three houses and they brought out a cot for us to sit down. The view was glorious—golden green forest behind and in front a sweep of plain and hill and close before us a long line of women with full water-pots on their heads coming slowly up the hill. I went on into the courtyard of one of the houses and sat down to watch the women grinding grain and tossing it in a fan to get rid of the chaff. Others were shaking rice and picking the stones from it. Little Indian hens and minute chickens pecked hopefully about, a calf wandered round bewildered, naked babies sprawled in the sun, and an old woman was making mud bins in the sun, patting the mud till it was smooth and round. There was companionship in this leisured simple toil though we could not talk to one another.

I can't write much about the parting from Patangarh; it was too sad. We all wept together and I left them a silent group with tears pouring down their faces. As we turned the corner of the hill there was the cook running hard to give us a last salute.

The years in the Gond villages taught me many things though, looking back, I am amazed that I did not learn more quickly. In this story of my life I have deliberately played down its difficulties. 'Being unhappy', said Sydney Smith, 'does no good,' and recalling, or describing, unhappiness does no good either. But memory is merciful to human beings, who cannot bear too much reality, for it censors the discouraging recollections of our darker moments. This does no harm so long as we recognize that



they are there in the past and we can learn from them. On balance, my life in the villages was a happy, exciting and rewarding time, but I should give a false impression if I left the reader with the impression that everything was roses, thornless roses, all the way.

Without Shamrao I could have done nothing. If I provided thinking and ideas, he translated them into action.

The struggle from conventional religion into freedom was very hard and, sensitive to other people's opinion as I was at that time, I dreaded opening my letters when I was in Karanjia. The hatred and jealousy I encountered distressed me and cast a cloud on my happiness. You cannot give yourself to a cause without opening the door to pain, and I have often been desperately worried, unable to sleep at night, over the tribes and their fate: whenever a friend went to jail or was deprived of his forest rights in hunting or fishing, or lost his land, it upset me intensely. The enemies of the tribal people became my enemies, and it was all the worse because so often I was powerless to help.

A lot of people were down on me in those days and, for an ordinary person, I had a rather disproportionate volume of notice in the press, some of it extravagantly kind and some bitterly hostile. At first I was very sensitive to this sort of thing, but gradually I learnt not to worry about it.

But my worst enemies were those of Everyman, inside myself. There was the weakness that comes from disliking people, the distraction that comes from being jealous of them, the resentment that inhibits love, that sick miserable feeling of uncertainty and apprehension that arises from bondage to oneself. And my greatest failure was in my first marriage.

Soon after we settled in Patangarh I married a very beautiful Gond girl, Kosi, who came from a village near Karanjia. She went with me on many

Kosi Elwin, *c.* 1940 (Verrier Elwin/British Library)

of my early tours and gave me a son whom we named Jawaharlal, partly after the Gond Raja, Jawahar Singh, of Sarangarh, a very dear friend of mine, and partly after Jawaharlal Nehru. But he has generally been called Kumar, which is easier to say.

Unhappily, tragically, this marriage did not work out well and after some years I got a divorce. I cannot even now look back on this period of my life without a deep sense of pain and failure; indeed I can hardly bear to write about it.

Later, I married Lila, a Pardhan girl who lived in Patangarh itself and this, though undeserved and almost unexpected, has worked out very well indeed.

Philanthropology

I was once introduced at a cocktail party to the wife of a British Colonel as an anthropologist. We sat down together on a sofa but I noticed that the lady squeezed herself into a corner as far away as possible and kept shooting furtive glances at me. Presently, however, after she had strengthened herself with three pink gins, she leant over and in a confidential and slightly guilty whisper asked me, 'Tell me, Dr Elwin, is anthropology very prevalent in your district?'

From the very beginning I was attracted by the practical application of anthropology and encouraged by the life of A.C. Haddon of Cambridge, than whom there could not have been a more exact scientist. . . .[but who believed] that there is nothing whatever hostile to scientific inquiry in having an intense and affectionate interest in the people one studies, in desiring their progress and welfare and in regarding them as human beings rather than as laboratory specimens.

The essence and art of anthropology is love. Without it, nothing is fertile, nothing is true.

For me anthropology did not mean 'field work': it meant my whole life. My method was to settle down among the people, live with them, share their life as far as an outsider could, and generally do several books together. My Baiga book took me seven years, *The Agaria* ten. I spent ten

years on my first collection of folktales and fourteen on the *Folk-Songs of Chhattisgarh*. And they were all going on at the same time. This meant that I did not depend merely on asking questions, but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was part of me.

And with knowledge came the desire to help. It was my realization of the psychological and economic impoverishment of the Baigas that led me to question the entire forest policy about shifting cultivation, which I have now examined in many parts of tribal India. It was initially the study of the Agarias that impressed me with the urgent need of encouraging the small cottage industries which were at one time in danger of disappearing altogether. A study of the Santals and Uraons equally impressed on me the importance of encouraging the few existing arts of the people. Some administrators were disturbed at the suspicious and even hostile attitude of tribes like the Bondos and Saoras towards outsiders. It was only when I had studied them very fully that I realized that they were not being merely bloody-minded, but that their apprehension was due to deep-rooted religious and magical ideas. Even the study of folktales and myths, which some people regard as unworthy of the notice of a serious scholar, brought home to me the importance of the fears and anxieties of the people and the need to ensure that we did nothing that would intensify them.

There are, of course, some fields of investigation which can and should be entirely academic, but in India at the present time, where, as a result of the great Five-Year Plans, the tribal people are being very rapidly changed and merged into ordinary society, I believe that we should put every possible anthropologist and sociologist into the work of guiding development and training its agents. This need not mean any lowering of the standards of research, still less a bias towards any particular theory. For it is the glory of science to direct the radiance of truth into the dark places of human life and transform them.

My first large work was *The Baiga* which John Murray published with the help of a subsidy from the Dorabji Tata Trust. Previously Dr and Mrs C.G. Seligman, to whom I look back as my real inspiration in this field, had helped me to publish an article on Baiga dreams in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* and I later did a second article for the same journal on the Vagina Dentata.

It was rather thrilling writing *The Baiga* and it had a remarkably good press, indeed the praise it received now seems to me somewhat extravagant. But like all the work we did at that time there was a certain atmosphere of enthusiasm and excitement which was, I think, infectious.

A Baiga veteran (Verrier Elwin/OUP)

To be among the Baigas was like living in the middle of a fairy story. Of all the tribes I know they are the most possessed by their mythology. And these myths were not just interesting tales tacked on to the fringe of their life. They were alive; every one of them was continually being put into action. When the Baiga was summoned to control a man-eating tiger, he faced this dangerous task with the more courage because he knew that the duty had been his from the beginning. When he performed magic on behalf of the Gond farmers, he recited the myth of the creation of the world and reminded his hearers of the unique share his tribe had in it. The myth breathed life into ancient custom; it made the unintelligible real; it turned the ancient heroes into contemporaries.

The Baiga is *the* magician and medicine-man, the classic type, who acts as intermediary between the other tribes and their gods. He is sent for by the Gonds to charm fertility into their reluctant seed; he is consulted even by Brahmins in time of sickness; it is believed that he can divert hail from a treasured field; he can detect with his divining-rod a stray bullock or a stolen goat far more efficiently than the police.

This tradition and pride of the Baigas brought them into conflict with Government in two ways. The first was that since they had been born from the womb of Mother Earth, they believed that it was a very wrong thing for them to lacerate her breast with the plough. The second

was that, since they were the true Pashupati, lords of animals, they considered that they should have the freedom of the forest for their hunting. Nothing shows more clearly the evils of an administration ignorant of tribal mythology and indifferent to its custom than the way the old Government dealt with the Baigas on these two points.

From 1867 to the end of the century the unfortunate Baigas were pursued by zealous forest officers, determined to make them stop their axe-and-hoe cultivation and take to the plough. At the same time much of their hunting was stopped and some of them were even forced to make heaps of their precious bows and arrows and burn them.

Shifting-cultivation is a bad thing: unfortunately it is often the only possible thing. The Baigas used to cut down a track of forest, set fire to the wood when dry, and sow their seeds in the ashes. After repeating this for three years, they would move on to another patch of forest. Obviously, even where a tribe had a religious passion for this type of cultivation, it could not be permitted on a large scale and for ever. But where only a few tribesmen practised it—and the Baigas were a very small tribe—and where a regular rotation of at least twenty years was observed, the harm it did to the forest was greatly exaggerated. The Baigas have practised this form of cultivation for centuries in Mandla and Balaghat, yet nowhere is there better forest today.

But the Baigas were forced to the plough; many were reduced to poverty, for they hated the tabooed implement, and all suffered psychological disturbance deep in their souls. They have today sunk into the position of impoverished and inferior cultivators. Robbed of their bows and arrows, they are no longer lords of the forest, the great shikaris of former times. They have lost much of what used to make life so rich and enjoyable.

I had many Baiga friends and they were all pledged to inform me if anything interesting happened. So one day there would come news that someone thirty miles away had died, and we would be off within the hour to watch the funeral. Another day there would be a marriage; another we would have to climb a tall hill to see a Honey Festival, in honour of the bees, that occurs only once in nine years. Yet again the Baigas would come to my own village and protect it with a magic wall by driving nails along the boundaries.

It was in the very remote Bohi that I watched the strange and thrilling ceremonies designed to close the jaws of the maneater and

to frustrate the witch who had sent him. It was a desperately serious business; seven of the most powerful magicians came to do battle with the forces of evil. The Tiger Spirit came upon one of the spectators; he was transformed into a tiger and began to behave like one: there was an exciting tiger hunt; and in the end nails were driven into rocks and trees.

The next morning, I was standing in the forest when a large pig lumbered up to me with a leaf in its mouth which it dropped at my feet. I was rather moved by this—sort of Francis among the birds touch, I thought—and then forgot all about it. But no sooner had I returned home than I went down with a violent attack of fever. The local magicians waited on me, and soon diagnosed the cause—the witch of Bohi, annoyed at my presence in the village, had put magic in a leaf and sent it to me by her pig. They immediately took the necessary measures, and I recovered.

The Baigas are very fond of pigs. One day a man came to me complaining that his wife had run away with someone else. 'That,' he said, 'I could have borne; but they took away my favourite pig.' A pleasant picture—the happy couple fleeing through the moonlit forest glades, and on the lover's shoulder is a pole bearing a protesting, squealing pig.

Once when we were driving through the forest beyond Kapildara we met a large tiger on the road. It was an open car and personally I was considerably alarmed. But an old Baiga sitting by me did not turn a hair; he began to mutter his charms and after a minute or two the tiger turned and went away quietly into the jungle. 'That is nothing,' the Baiga told me. 'There was a man called Dugru who used to be visited by three or four tigers at a time. They would lick his hands and feet and stroke him with their paws. Sometimes he got tired of them and would tell them to go away, and they always obeyed him.'

And he told another story of how once the Baigas, angry at some restriction of their forest rights, had warned all the tigers in their area that the Governor was coming for a hunt, and as a result His Excellency did not get a single animal!

It is very important that the anthropologist should come down from his perch and, as far as he possibly can, become what G.K. Chesterton once called 'the invisible man'. This was in one of the

Father Brown detective stories where the murderer was the postman. All the witnesses declared that nobody had visited the house where the deed was done, but they forgot the postman who fitted into the picture so completely that he didn't count. It is not easy to reach this standard but I was always trying to, and one of the greatest compliments; an ethnographer could be paid was once given me by a Baiga. I had visited his village and been received with great friendliness but none of the fuss and deference which the touring officer generally receives. One of my company was annoyed at this and said to the villagers: 'Here is a sahib: he must be someone important. Why don't you make proper arrangements for his reception?' The Baiga laughed at this. 'We know it's only Bara Bhai'—the usual name for me, by which I was distinguished from Shamrao, the Chhota Bhai: in fact we were often known by a portmanteau name, Bara Bhai-Chhota Bhai, Big Brother-Little Brother. 'He is such an ordinary man that when we see him coming we say, "Oh, it's only Bara Bhai, there's no need to bother!"'

The Baiga brought me many new friends, chief of whom was W.G. (Bill) Archer. The popular notion in India about the Indian Civil Service, that its members were stiff and arrogant, is not altogether correct. It also included some of the most friendly, sensitive and intelligent people you could meet anywhere, people like Bill himself or N.R. Pillai, V. Viswanathan (now Home Secretary), J.H. Hutton, the present Governor of Assam, and others whom I describe elsewhere in this book.

Shortly after the *The Baiga* was published, Bill wrote inviting me to Bihar. He was then Census Superintendent for the Province and Shamrao and I went to stay with him and had the opportunity of touring in many Uraon, Munda, Ho and Asur villages. Later, when Bill was Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas, I toured widely with him there and, later still, made a number of visits to the Santal and Uraon villages. These experiences enriched my book on the Murias and my first book on tribal art.

On this first visit I had the opportunity of meeting Sarat Chandra Roy, the veteran philanthropologist who not only wrote a whole series of books on the Bihar tribes but fought valiantly for the people both in the courts and outside. After his death Bill Archer and I, with the help of his son Romesh, took over the journal *Man in India,* which we edited for a number of years.

Lying to the south of what was then the Central Provinces was the State of Bastar, a territory the size of Belgium. The great plain of Chhattisgarh stretches down past Raipur and Dhamtari in hot and dusty monotony till it spends itself against the hills of Kanker. Thenceforward the journey is a never-failing delight; as the traveller moves towards the Bastar plateau the countryside breaks into song about him; he is greeted by hardy smiling woodmen singing at their work; the skyline is broken by fantastic piles of rock; all around is the evergreen sal forest. Presently he sees looming up before him a row of sharply-rising hills, the sentinels that stand on guard before the country of the Murias, and the long steep ascent of the Keskal Ghat has to be essayed. From the summit there is a magnificent view of the great sea of hill and forest below.

Finally, in May 1940, I went to Bastar with the idea of doing something really serious, and I was actually given an official appointment, that of Census Officer, which paid a monthly salary of a hundred rupees. Even at that time I was hardly educated in the ways of the world and was not aware that both one's travelling allowance and the respect in which one was held in official India depended almost entirely on one's pay. When I got to Bastar, however, Norval Mitchell, a very good type, who had then taken charge and gave me all possible support, changed this extraordinary arrangement and paid me a lump sum of 1500 rupees for my work on the Census. Of course, all I wanted was some kind of official status without which in those days it was difficult to do any work in an Indian State. Later we again changed the arrangement and I became Hon. Ethnographer to Bastar. A local paper, boggling at the word 'ethnographer', announced that I had been appointed Hon. Stenographer.

My idea was to follow my usual technique and settle down among the people. We built a lovely little house of stone (which cost only 200 rupees) opposite the stupendous and beautiful Falls of Chitrakot and made small huts, quite habitable, at 40 rupees each, in two Muria villages. Our main centre continued to be at Patangarh, where Shamrao held the fort while I was away.

At that time Bastar was entirely delightful. The tribal people were poor but they were free and happy. There was a quality of enthusiasm and zest in their lives. Their dances were amongst some of the finest in India and they had not been corrupted by Puritan workers into a belief that their beautiful bodies were something to be ashamed of.

I travelled all over the State and collected a lot of notes and photographs of the Hill Marias of the Abujhmar whom we visited on elephants, the Koyas, Bhattras, Dorlas and others. But my main interest was in two of the tribes—the Bison-Horn Marias of the south and the Murias of the north. I did a book on the Marias called *Maria Murder and Suicide,* trying to discover what it was that drove these simple people to homicide, and I also studied the conditions in the Jagdalpur jail which I tried to get improved.

Of all the tribes I have studied, I found the Marias the most attractive and field-work among them the most comfortable and pleasant. The Bison-Horn Maria area was even in 1941 accessible in the open season by car, and every village had a well-built rest-house for visitors. The people were friendly, the climate was excellent, and I enjoyed my years there enormously.

It was in Bastar that I first began to use the gramophone as a means of breaking down barriers and creating a friendly atmosphere. I got some excellent Hindi comic records and also used to play a little Mozart and Beethoven which, I am sorry to say, did not go down very well.

And then, in the middle of one of my tours, a young man suddenly arrived in camp with a very large box, which had been sent up from Jagdalpur by the police. When we opened it we found it full of superb mechanical toys sent by two friends in Bombay. These toys must have given more pleasure over a wider area than any collection of toys that was ever made. Some of them lasted for eight years and I took one or two, their well-worn mechanisms still ticking over, with me on expeditions in NEFA. They were certainly a great help in making contact with the Marias.

Yet normally, anything unusual was dangerous. The Marias were very suspicious, for example, of the Census. They recalled that after the 1931 Census many tigers had appeared in the forest. It is always risky to count and measure, for 'the sin of numbering the people' may reduce fertility. So after the 1941 Census, in most villages, the house number-boards were carried out and sacrifices of pigs were made before them.

The Marias were a tough and rather formidable tribe, with a very high incidence of homicide, six times that of the neighbouring Central Provinces. The jail at Jagdalpur was always, crowded with Marias serving

sentences for murder. The administration was worried about this, and I offered to try and discover why it was. I was given the freedom of the Record Room and here, after turning over a great number of dusty files, I found a hundred that gave me the sort of information I wanted. I also wanted suicide records, but these were not so easy to come by, for they were not kept at headquarters but in the local police-stations. But the Superintendent of Police called in all the suicide files, and I was able to find fifty about the Marias.

Having collected the records I mapped out the villages where anything had happened and visited as many as I could. I talked to the relatives of the murderers and of their victims, got the opinions of village elders, studied the attitude of the other villagers, and frequently met the actual individuals who had served their term (for the death sentence was very rarely imposed) and had now returned home.

An analysis of the reasons and motives for these murders was revealing. Quarrels over property accounted for 15 per cent; family quarrels for 16 per cent; jealousy, infidelity, sex motives in general, for 17 per cent. Nineteen per cent were more or less trivial crimes committed when drunk. Only five per cent were caused by the suspicion or accusation of witchcraft and sorcery. There were six murders committed for revenge, and nine out of résentment at abuse or 'word-magic'. This last is an important and curious motive: to use the wrong kind of words may be a very risky thing, being not only insulting to the feelings but dangerous (magically) to the person.

One of the things which was a revelation, not only to me, but also (I have been told) to more than one Sessions Judge, was the discovery of the part played by fatigue in promoting acts of violence. There can be a sort of fatigue-intoxication, not unlike that caused at a certain stage by alcohol. Fatigue can cause dejection and irritability, worry, desperation and a desire to escape from a situation which seems intolerable. And the Marias, like other peasants, often get very tired. They return home in the evening; supper is not ready, the child is crying, and in a flash there is a blow and a dearly-loved wife is dead and a home is ruined.

I spent many hours in the Jagdalpur jail, talking to Maria prisoners, and what struck me most was the remarkable innocence of many of them. They felt that an inexplicable destiny had overtaken them. They did not feel like criminals; in many cases their crimes were no more than tragic accidents. They were a very sad company.

I first became interested in prisons in the Satyagraha days when I made emphatic protest about the treatment of political prisoners. Then, later, my experiences with the police in Mandla gave me almost a horror of their methods and of the whole idea of punishment and retribution in the treatment of crime.

The descent of the police on a tribal village is a dreadful thing. For days the entire community is kept from its work and often has difficulty even in getting anything to eat. How often we watched it happen! The Sub-Inspector arrived and made his camp in the best house in the village. He and his constables had to be provided free of charge with food and drink of a kind that the people themselves could only afford at great festivals. Third-degree methods were often used before and, I am sorry to say, even after Independence to obtain evidence. No one felt safe. For days the shy and timid tribal people were distracted by anxiety. Large sums of money secretly changed hands and when the final arrest was made it was a heart-rending sight to watch the prisoner in his handcuffs escorted to the boundary of the village by a crowd of weeping relations.

I had the opportunity of visiting a number of prisons and seeing how the tribal people fared, and in Bastar my interest developed greatly. Dramatic incidents still further impressed on me the importance of revising our methods of investigation as well as our treatment of criminals. A girl in a village near Sanhrwachhapar was accused of poisoning her husband. The accepted routine was followed and though the villagers were convinced, as I was, that she was innocent—and villagers are seldom wrong about this sort of thing—she was arrested and sent to jail where she was capitally convicted. We did not think that there was any real danger of her being hanged, but one day I received a telegram from Frittles Grigson telling me that if nothing was done she would be hanged within a very short time. I have never driven a car so fast in my life as when I made the three-hundred-mile journey up to Pachmarhi, where the Government was having its summer session, in the hope of obtaining a reprieve. When I arrived I was told that it was too late. But I persevered and in the end succeeded in saving the girl's life, and she was reprieved to the terrible mercy of life-imprisonment.

On one of my visits to jail, I saw, and can still see, two young Gonds in handcuffs for murdering a Pathan moneylender who had driven them to the despair of hopeless poverty. With great eyes filled with

bewilderment and fear, like frightened and beautiful deer of the forest, the two little Gonds were surrounded by enormous constables.

The tribesmen suffer out of all proportion in jail. 'If a Maria is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment,' says Grigson, 'he will beg to be hanged rather than be confined within walls: and few of the wilder Bison-horn Marias survive long imprisonment.' The grim forbidding walls, the stone beds, the rule of silence, the unfamiliar food and language, the attitude of suppliant and obsequious deference before officials, the absence of recreations, the lack of religious comfort, the denial of human companionship, the appalling monotony oppress and crush them.

This is particularly true of the frontier areas. The NEFA tribesman, who is taken down from the mountains and sent to prison in the plains, suffers, in addition to the inevitable sense of isolation, the affront to human dignity, the loneliness and despair that afflict all prisoners, special deprivations. The heat of the plains is almost unbearable to a hillman. It is probable that no one knows his language. He himself may only have a few words of Hindi or Assamese. In some cases tribal prisoners have been in jail for years without hearing a word of their families and they are too far away from them for visits.

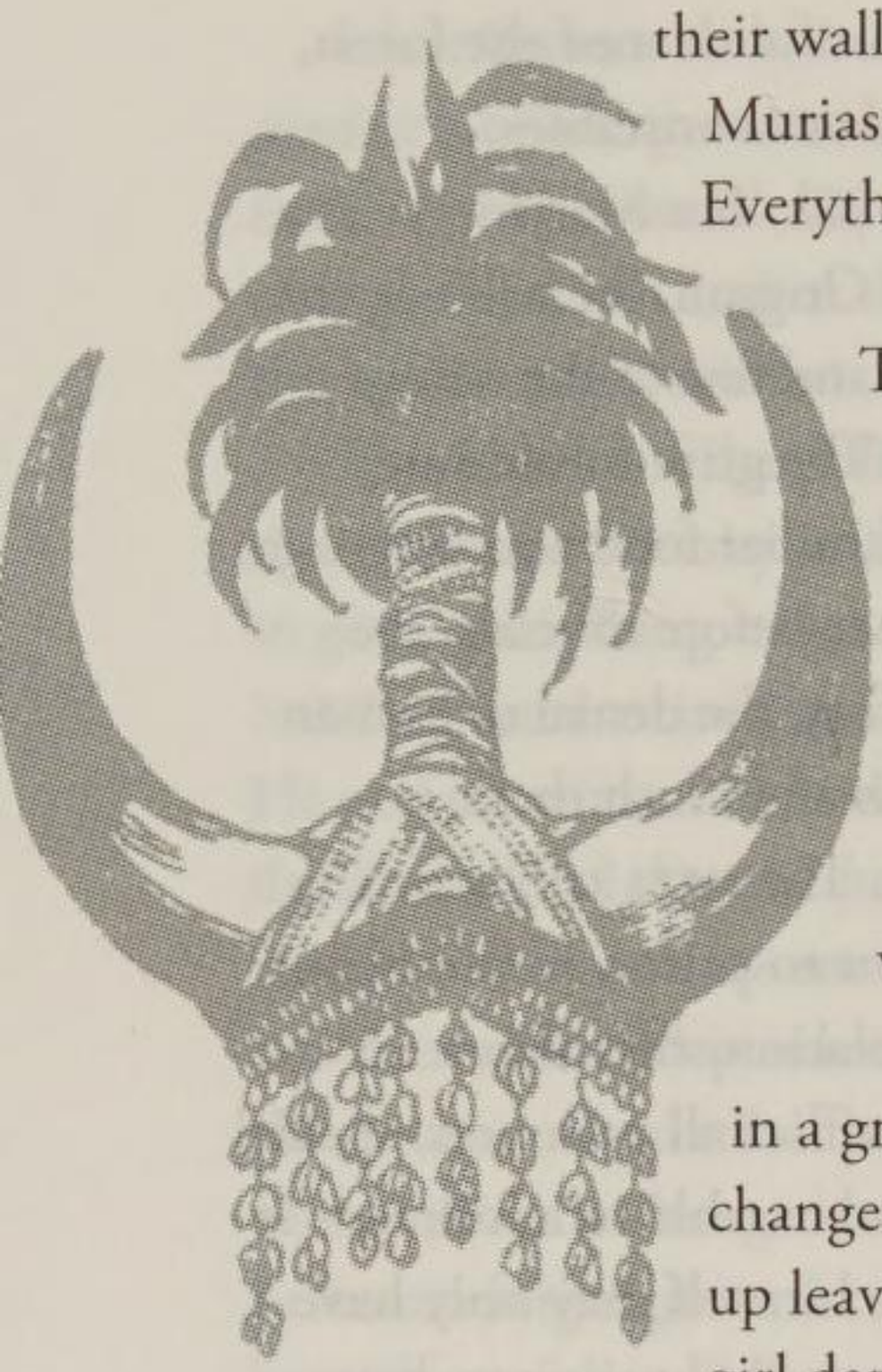
Some of us have been very keen to have a special jail for our tribal people, which will be a place of healing and restoration and where the whole idea of punishment and revenge will be banished. It is, however, extraordinary how even today many officials think in very different terms. 'They put on weight while they are with us,' a Jail Superintendent told me. 'They do not feel things as we do,' said another, and many people have urged that even in the worst jail a tribal convict has a better time than at home.

The Marias

The most memorable thing about the Marias is their superb marriage-dance when the men, wearing great headdresses of bison-horns and carrying their long drums, move in a large circle, while a row of women thread their way among them. It is probably the finest dance in tribal India.

The headdress of bison-horns is the chief treasure of a Maria home. It is kept with the utmost care, dismantled, in closed bamboo baskets, and it takes nearly an hour to assemble.

This headdress, and the dance, is the sole expression of the Marias' aesthetic sensibility. They do not carve, or paint, or model images on



Bison-horn Maria headdress

their walls; they do, not, like their neighbours, the Murias, make attractive combs and tobacco-holders. Everything they have to say goes into the dance.

And what a superb spectacle they created! The women were less elaborately attired than the men, but they too were clothed in their own beauty, which was emphasized by the mass of bead and brass necklaces that almost covered the breasts, and the snoods and fillets of shining brass about their heads. I believe that officials have now taught them to put on white saris and cover themselves 'properly'.

The men, carrying their long drums, move in a great circle with a large variety of turns and changes; the 'bison' charge and fight each other, pick up leaves on the point of their horns, and chase the girl dancers.

The girls, each with a dancing-stick in her right hand, form a long line and go round and through the men dancers with many different movements and steps. They do not usually sing, and indeed the tune would be lost in the thunder of the drums. As they go, they beat the ground with their sticks, 'dum-dum-dum, di-dum, dum-dum'. Masked mummers, clowns dressed in straw, naked acrobats carrying clubs, wooden guns and nets, add to the gaiety of the scene.

To witness this dance was an unforgettable experience. 'Whosoever danceth not, knoweth not the way of life,' and conversely these people, for all their poverty, found in the supreme ecstatic rhythm of their dance a way of life that raised them above mediocrity into a kind of splendour.

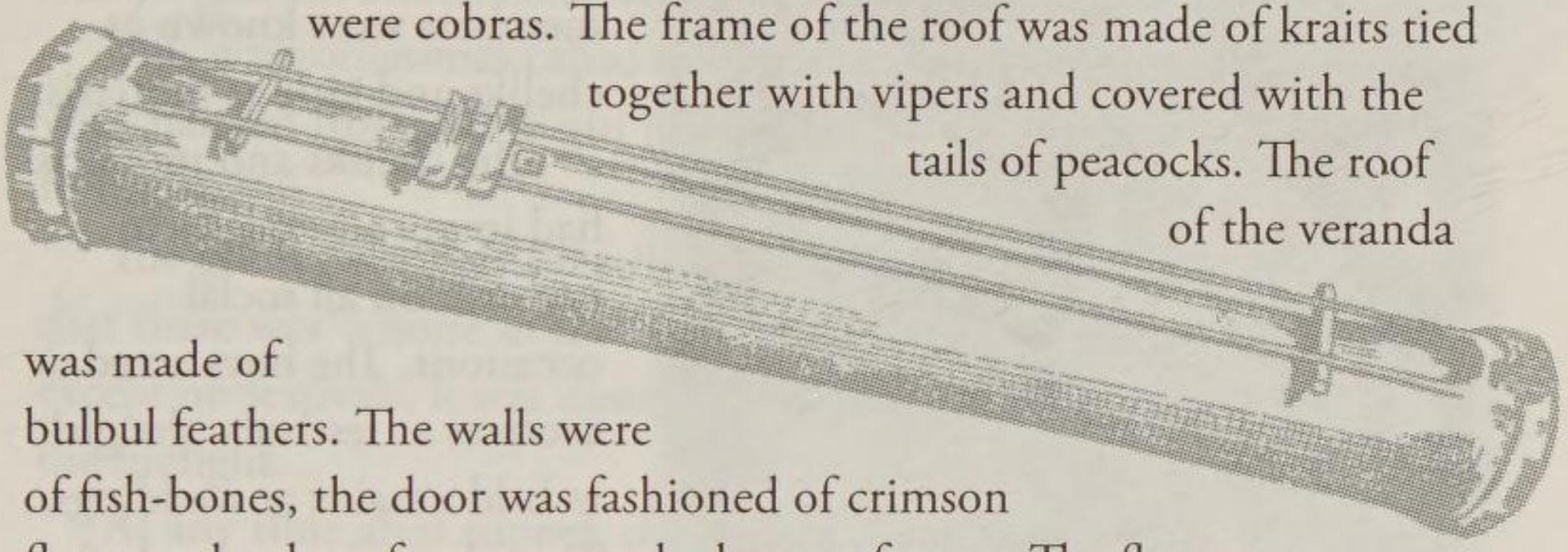
The Murias

But my most important work in Bastar was to study the ghotul, the unique dormitory-club of the Muria boys and girls. The Murias live to the north of the Marias, all over a very large wooded plateau, in substantial villages many of which could, even in my day, be reached by car. The climate was good, the people friendly and responsive, the country was easy—and the whole business was exciting and interesting and new.

At this time the Murias enjoyed almost entire freedom. Once I was off the main road and away from the few administrative centres, I hardly ever saw an official. The people lived their own life, unhampered if unimproved, and they lived it well. But what I shall say about them is a part of history now and I must write in the past tense.

The ghotul was the central focus of Muria life, coming down to modern times from Lingo, the heroic ancestor of the tribe, who founded it.

The first ghotul is described as beautiful as the horns of bison, beautiful as a horse's throat. Its central pillar was a python, its poles were cobras. The frame of the roof was made of kraits tied together with vipers and covered with the tails of peacocks. The roof of the veranda



was made of bulbul feathers. The walls were of fish-bones, the door was fashioned of crimson flowers, the door-frames were the bones of ogres. The floor was plastered with pulse. The seats were crocodiles.

The lord of the house wore a turban like a white gourd-flower; his dhoti was coloured silk; his shirt shone in the sun; his clogs were made of sandalwood, his stockings of mongoose fur, his belt was a long thin snake; as he walked he sparkled. In his hand he carried the eighteen instruments of music, heavy with the charms of love.

Such is the legendary picture of Lingo and the first ghotul.

Similar institutions are widely distributed among communities of the Austro-Asiatic cultures, but it seems probable that the Muria ghotul was one of the most highly developed and carefully organized in the world. For what was a village guardroom for the Nagas, a boys' club among the Uraons, a refuge for temporary sexual association in Indonesia, was for the Murias the centre of social and religious life. For although the ghotul was an independent autonomous children's republic, it had an all-pervading influence on the grown-ups, who could not manage any social function without its help.

All the unmarried boys and girls of the tribe had to be members of the ghotul. This membership was elaborately organized; after a period

Muria chelik and motiari outside the ghotul (Sunil Janah/OUP)

of probation, boys and girls were initiated and given special titles which carried with them graded ranks and social duties. Leaders were appointed to lead and discipline the society; the boys' leader was often called the Sirdar: the girls' leader was the Belosa. Boy members were known as cheliks and girls as motiaris.

The cheliks and motiaris had important duties to perform on all social occasions. The boys acted as acolytes at festivals, the girls as bridesmaids at weddings. They danced together before the clan-gods and at great fairs. They formed a choir at the funerals of important people. Their games and dances enlivened and enriched village life and redeemed it from that crushing monotony which was its normal characteristic in other parts of India.

It was natural that the ghotul, 'dear nurse of arts', should foster every kind of art, for here the boys and girls were all the time on their toes to attract one another and to make life what they believed it should be, beautiful, lively and interesting. And so the boys made and decorated charming little combs for their girls, and elaborate tobacco-boxes for themselves; the girls made necklaces, pendants and belts of beads and cowries. The boys carved the pillars and doors of their ghotul building, which was often the finest house in a village. They made exciting toys and masks. And above all they danced.

But this is common to many other cultures. What gave the ghotul its unique interest was the approved and recognized relationship between the boys and girls.

There were two types of ghotul. In the first, and probably the oldest, which was sometimes called the 'yoking' ghotul, the rule was that of fidelity to a single partner during the whole of the pre-marital period. Each chelik was paired off with a motiari; he was formally 'married' to her and she took the feminine form of his title as her own. Divorce was allowed, though 'infidelity' was punished.

In the second type of ghotul, which was probably a later development of the classic model, any kind of lasting attachment between chelik and motiari was forbidden. No one could say that such and such a motiari was *his* girl; his attachment was rationed to three days at a time.

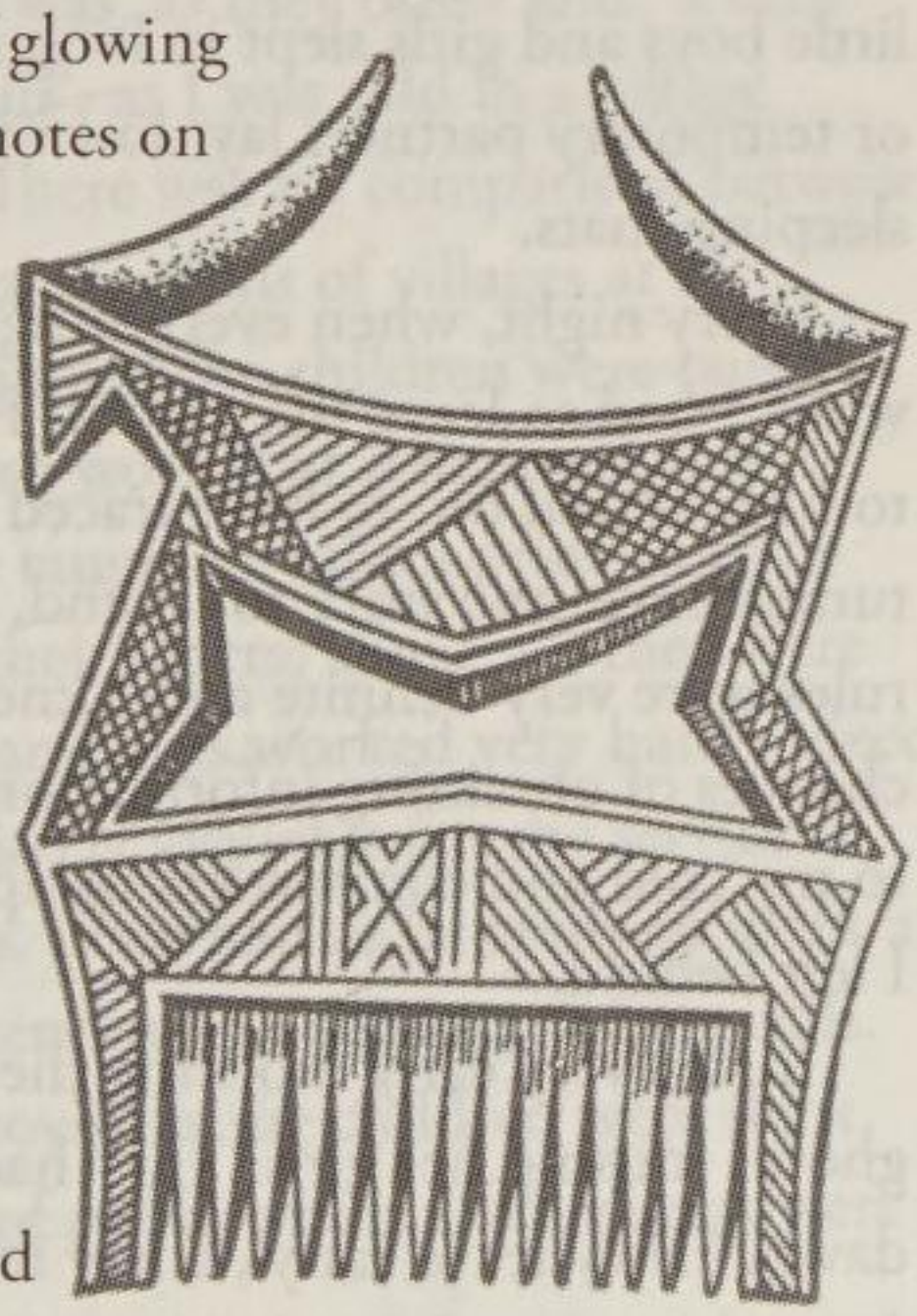
This was sometimes called the 'changing ring' ghotul; because in it you changed from girl to girl just as you changed your rings from finger to finger.

The ghotul was very literally a night-club; it was only in the evening that there was 'a noise in the belly of the elephant'; during the day, except on festivals, it was deserted. The real life of the ghotul was in the firelight.

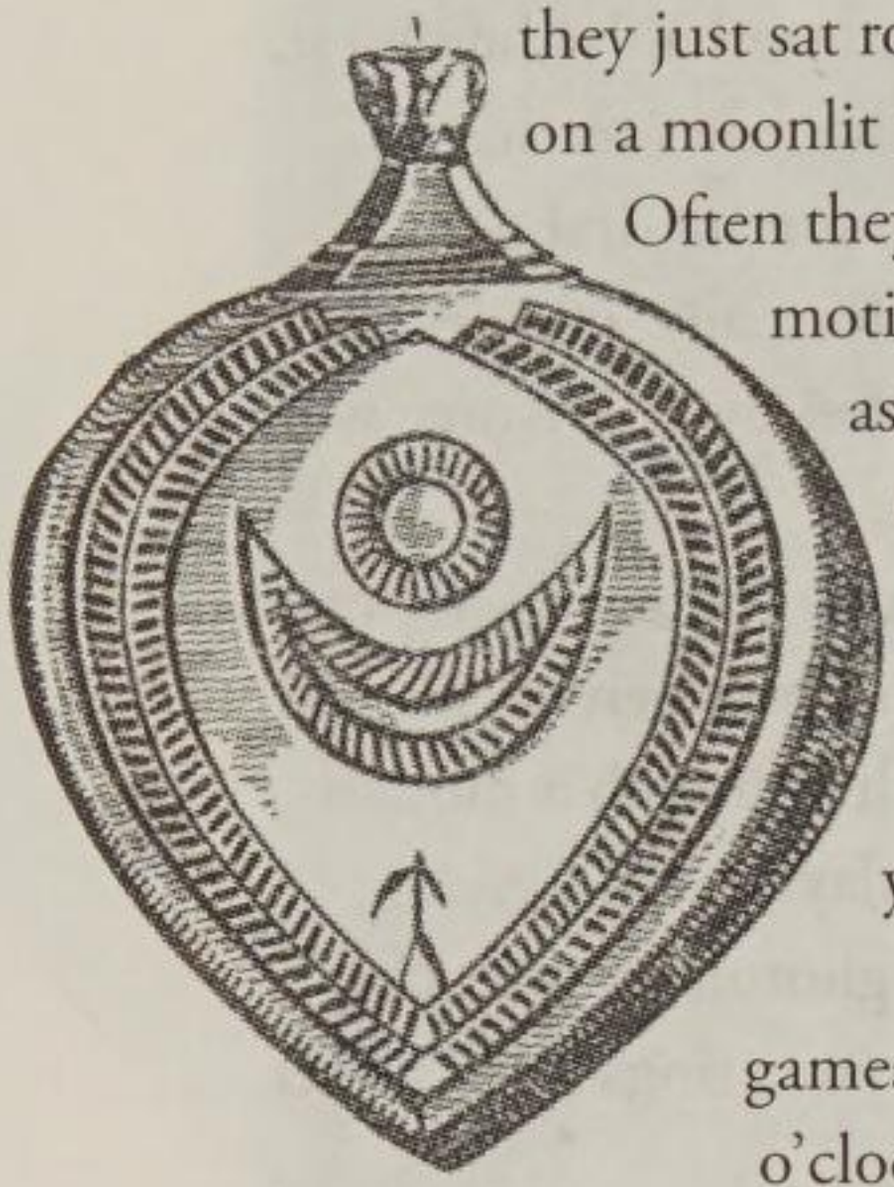
At any time after supper, the cheliks began to assemble. They came one by one, carrying their sleeping-mats and perhaps their drums. The little boys brought their daily 'tribute' of wood, 'clocked in' by showing it to the official responsible and threw it in a corner. The elder boys gathered round the fire; one took a half-smoked leaf-pipe from his turban and ignited it by placing a bit of glowing wood in the cup, another played a few notes on his flute, a third spread his mat and lay down. The Kotwar inspected the buildings to see if the girls had done their work properly. Gradually all the boys assembled.

Then the girls came in, with a rush, all together, and gathered round their own fire. After a while they scattered, some sitting with the boys, others singing in a corner, some lying down.

The others occupied the time in pleasant harmony; sometimes they danced for an hour or two; the smaller children played rampageous games; sometimes



Comb from Palari.
The two horns are of bees-wax



A sun and moon tobacco-box

they just sat round the fire and talked; in the hot weather on a moonlit night they scattered all about the compound. Often they sang lying down, two by two, chelik with motiari, or in little groups. A boy told a story; they asked riddles; they reported on the affairs of the day; there was sometimes a ghotul trial; they planned a dancing expedition or allotted duties at a wedding. I shall never forget the sight in some of the larger ghotuls of sixty or seventy youngsters thus engaged.

After an hour or two of dancing, singing, games or story-telling, certainly not much after ten o'clock, the serious business of the evening began. The little boys went round saluting their elders, a ritual then repeated by the girls. One of them distributed finely-powdered tobacco from the ghotul store, to which all the parents contributed. Then the girls each went to her partner of the day and sat down behind him. First of all, she shook out and arranged his hair and then combed it. When this was done, she massaged him, sometimes with oilseed, sometimes rubbing his back with her comb, and then she cracked his fingers one by one.

By then it was fairly late and the boys and girls prepared to sleep. The little boys and girls slept in long rows, while those who had permanent or temporary partners lay down with them in each other's arms on their sleeping-mats.

Every night, when everything had warmed up, there came a moment when I had to leave the ghotul. I would have given almost anything to have stayed on, to have traced (having watched the process of tumescence) the story to its end, even if only as an observer. But the rules were very definite and I knew that if I broke them even once my chances of obtaining information might be lost. So I always went away to my cold and comfortless camp, nostalgic for the happy, exciting world I left behind.

In the very early morning the Belosa got up and went round the ghotul rousing her girls. They had to be out of the building before dawn. 'They leave early', a boy told me, 'because they come laughing from the arms of the cheliks and feel shy about it.'

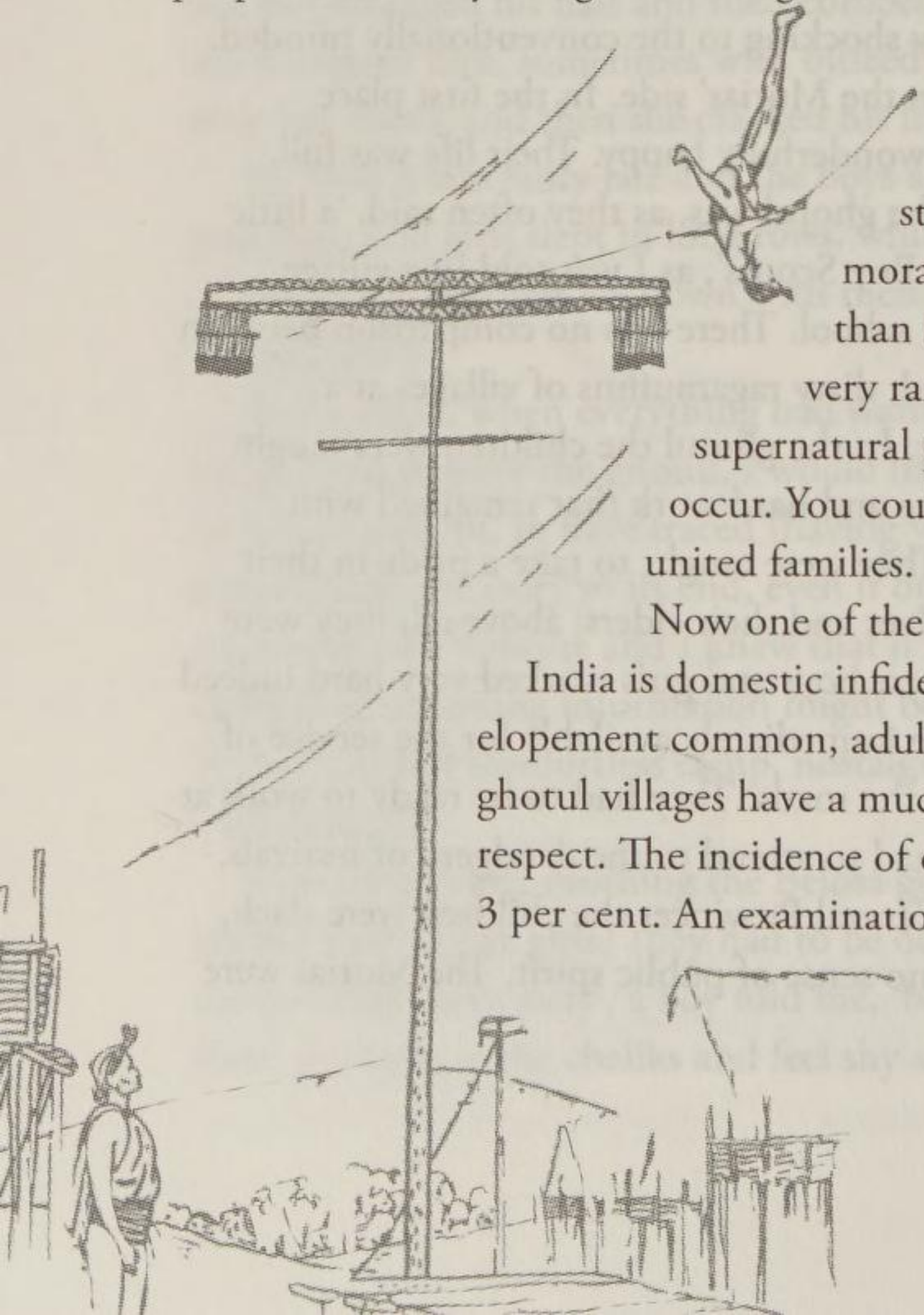
At least at the time I knew them, the Murias had a simple, innocent and natural attitude to sex. In the ghotul this was strengthened by the absence of any sense of guilt and the general freedom from external interference. The Murias believed that sexual congress was a good thing; it did you good; it was healthy and beautiful; when performed by the right people (such as a chelik and motiari who were not taboo to one another), at the right time (outside the menstrual period and avoiding forbidden days), and in the right place (within the ghotul walls where no 'sin' could be committed), it was the happiest and best thing in life.

This belief in sex as something good and normal gave the Murias a light touch. Their saying that the young lovers were *hassi ki nat,* in a 'joking relationship' to each other, expressed their attitude exactly. Sex was great fun; it was the best of ghotul games; it was the dance of enraptured bodies; it was an ecstatic swinging in the arms of the beloved. It ought not to be too intense; it must not be degraded by possessiveness or defiled by jealousy. It was believed that the best and most successful sex relations were to be had in the modern ghotul where partners often changed.

All this was, of course, very shocking to the conventionally minded. Yet there is much to be said on the Murias' side. In the first place the cheliks and motiaris were wonderfully happy. Their life was full, interesting, exciting, useful. The ghotul was, as they often said, 'a little school'. The cheliks were 'like Boy Scouts', as I was told in a village which had a troop in the local school. There was no comparison between these children and the sad-eyed, dirty ragamuffins of villages at a similar cultural level elsewhere. In the ghotul the children were taught lessons of cleanliness, discipline and hard work that remained with them throughout their lives. They were taught to take a pride in their appearance, to respect themselves and their elders; above all, they were taught the spirit of service. These boys and girls worked very hard indeed for the public good. They were immediately available for the service of State officials or for labour on the roads. They had to be ready to work at a wedding or a funeral. They had to attend to the drudgery of festivals. In most tribal villages of the Central Provinces the children were slack, dirty, undisciplined and with no sense of public spirit. The Murias were very different.

With all this the missionary or social reformer would be in agreement. 'But', they would say, 'that is not the point. Our complaint is that these boys and girls sleep together.' It was at least one point in their favour that this sleeping together did not seem to do them a great deal of harm. There were no signs of corruption or excess; these bright-eyed, merry-faced boys and girls did not give you the impression of being the victims of debasing lust. They were living a life of fulfilment and it seemed to do them good.

They did (perhaps they still do) sleep together, but under conditions of discipline and some restraint. Children in other tribal villages also have sexual congress but without discipline and restraint. The tribal and semi-tribal boys whom I knew for so many years in other parts of central India all too often began their sexual life before the age of twelve and indulged in it freely till they were married and after. It is notorious that venereal disease has long been rampant throughout tribal India, and some of the most pathetic sights I have seen have been cases of young boys and girls afflicted by it. I have no hesitation in saying that for the areas that I know intimately, there was more sexual excess among young people in ordinary villages than in ghotul villages.



Another interesting and curious point is that there were few people with a stronger sense of domestic morality and conjugal fidelity than the Muria. Adultery was very rare, and was visited with supernatural punishment when it did occur. You could not find happier or more united families.

Now one of the drawbacks of semi-tribal India is domestic infidelity. Divorce is universal, elopement common, adultery an everyday affair. The ghotul villages have a much higher standard in this respect. The incidence of divorce in Bastar was under 3 per cent. An examination of 50 marriages in Patangarh showed 23 divorces or 46 per cent. We may also consider

how the ghotul boys and girls were almost completely free from those furtive and unpleasant vices that so mar our modern civilization. There was hardly any masturbation; where it was practised, it was due to the mistaken efforts of reformers to improve the ghotul. Prostitution was unknown, unthinkable. No motiari would ever give her body for money.

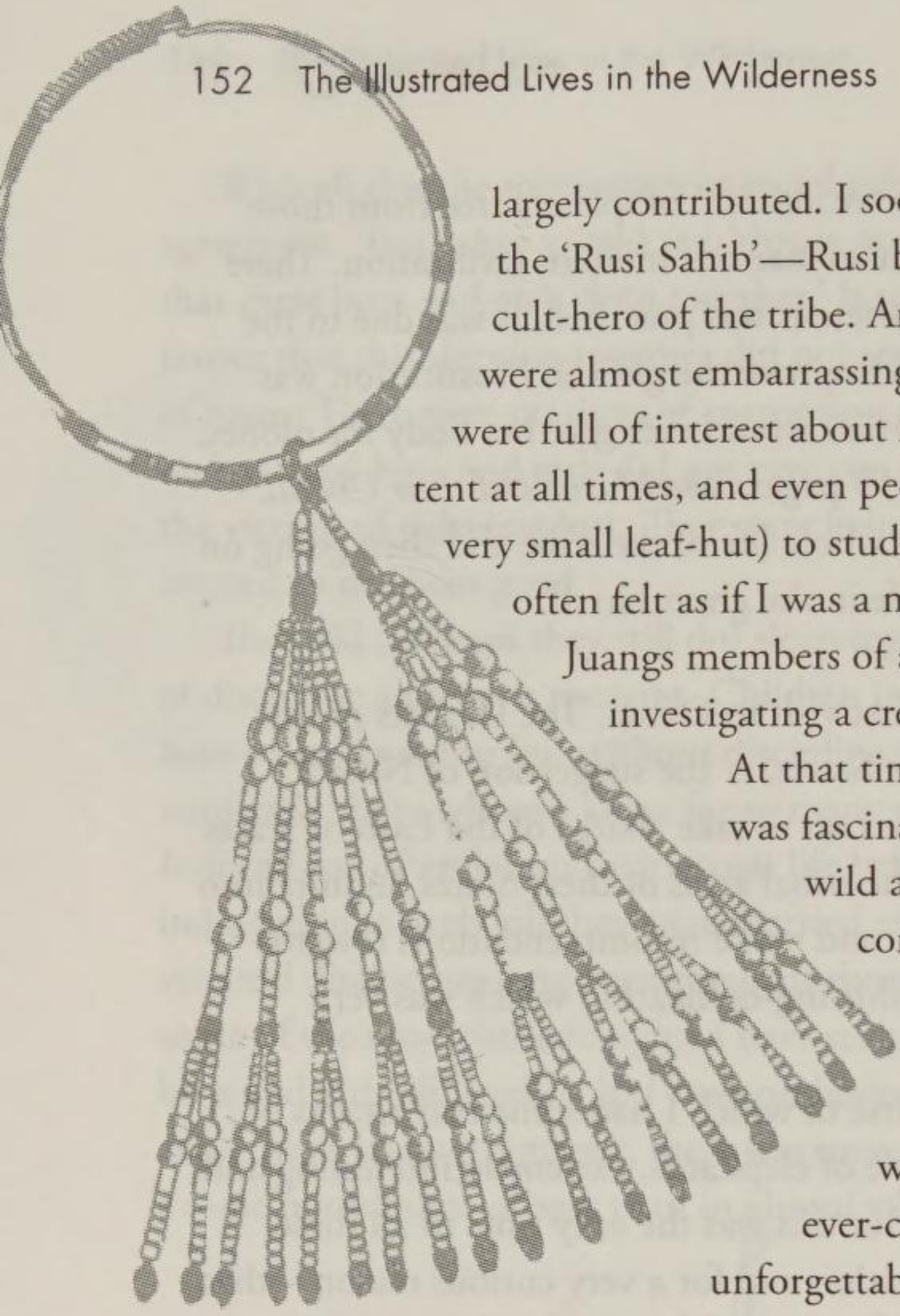
I wrote a big book of over 750 pages, *The Muria and their Ghotul,* about all this, studying first the whole life of the tribe and then going on to describe in great detail the life in the ghotul itself.

In December 1942 I paid my first visit to Orissa. The Darbars of the Bonai, Keonjhar and Pal Lahara States, at the suggestion of Norval Mitchell who had by then moved on to take charge of the Eastern States Agency, invited me to tour in the tribal areas of these States, inquire into the life and habits of the people and make recommendations towards the solution of the problem of shifting-cultivation which was very widespread there at this time.

I found this tour, in the course of which I had some bad attacks of fever but was assisted by a couple of elephants, extremely interesting and I think my Report was useful. But this was the only time in all these years that I was met with opposition and for a very curious reason—that the villagers thought I had come to stop shifting-cultivation and rob them of their land whereas my Report actually made very different recommendations.

All sorts of rumours went about. An English official had gone with the Forest Adviser to the Bhuiya Pirh the previous year and the villagers believed that they were pursuing two European fugitives supposed to be hiding in the hills. Popular rumour had it that I myself was seeking to establish a place of refuge in the event of a Japanese invasion. In Bonai a belief that we were exporting girls 'for the war' meant that I hardly ever saw a woman who was not over military age. In the wilder Juang hills of Keonjhar, though some of the people remembered the former Administrator Macmillan (a popular, and then almost legendary, figure who married a Bhuiya girl), many had never seen a white face before and, believing me to be an evil spirit, fled into the jungle with shrill cries of horror and amazement.

But these suspicions soon disappeared and before long, specially in Pal Lahara and among the Juangs, there was a very friendly atmosphere—to which our elephants and Kumar, then a small baby,



largely contributed. I soon found myself being called the 'Rusi Sahib'—Rusi being the name of the ancient cult-hero of the tribe. And once friendly, the Juangs were almost embarrassing in their attentions. They were full of interest about my way of life, invading the tent at all times, and even peeping into my bathroom (a very small leaf-hut) to study my techniques. Indeed, I often felt as if I was a museum specimen and the Juangs members of an ethnological committee investigating a creature of the absurdest habits!

At that time a visit to the Juang country was fascinating. The country was wild and beautiful. The journeys continually surprised us with the splendour of the landscape, and the palm-girt flat lands round darling Malyagiri, whose rocks caught the sun in ever-changing shades of colour, were unforgettable. In early December, the country had special charm, for all the hills were carpeted with fields of yellow sarson.

Two things about the Juangs stirred me very deeply. One was their poverty, the other their grace and beauty as displayed in their 'animal ballet'. To see a typical Juang village one had to go to the highest uplands of Keonjhar. Here were some of the most picturesque hamlets in peninsular India, comparable only to the enchanting Bondo villages of the Koraput Hills. Each village stood self-contained within a large fence in a site chosen not only for convenience but also for beauty. The houses, little huts of mud with red walls, were either in a huddle on top of one another or neatly arranged in narrow streets. Near by were well-kept sheds for goats and cattle. In the centre of the village was an open space used for a dancing-ground in front of the often imposing village dormitory or club, the Darbar, where the unmarried youths slept and the elders assembled on all important occasions. The people were comparatively prosperous.

The Juangs of Pal Lahara presented a melancholy contrast to those of Keonjhar. In the second decade of the present century, the forest

round the slopes of Malyagiri was reserved and the Juangs suddenly found themselves cut off from their normal means of livelihood. They were given cattle and land in villages at the foot of the mountains, but they could not take to the unfamiliar plough, wild elephants destroyed the crops, and the cattle, 'which were old and decrepit', died in a year or two. The Juangs swiftly fell into the position of landless serfs in economic bondage to their neighbours, got more and more into debt, lost their fields and, when I saw them, were making a miserable living by weaving baskets—one of the most pitifully unremunerative of India's village industries. A man could make one large basket a day and got half an anna for it. He paid eight annas a year, or the equivalent of sixteen days' work, for the privilege of taking bamboo from the forest he regarded as his.

The economic condition of these Juangs was deplorable. I shall not easily forget going by night into a Juang village and seeing old women, naked but for a single rag about the loins, lying on the bare ground and trying to get a little warmth from a flickering fire. The physique of the people was poor and they were very diseased; the fine hard struggle with wild Nature in Keonjhar developed muscle and strength—but in Pal Lahara basket-making was a sedentary craft.

Even worse than their economic decay was their complete religious and cultural collapse. Gone were the fine Darbar halls, with their often remarkable carvings, of the Keonjhar Hills. Gone were the stone pillars to the village goddess. Since they had lost their own land, the Juangs themselves were unable to offer worship or sacrifice to their gods; they had to call in (and pay for) outside priests and magicians to help them. The beautifully fashioned combs, the elaborate smoker's equipment, the gay necklaces, which were so marked a feature of Keonjhar Juang life, were hardly known here.

The Juangs of Pal Lahara were the worst possible advertisement for a policy of stopping axe-cultivation or of moving people down to the plains. They underlined everything that the most captious critics have said against the forest administration. They were a pitiful instance of what happens when high-landers are dislodged from their mountains.

The traditional dress of Juang women was a mass of bead ornaments round the neck and a skirt of leaves fastened about the waist by a girdle of bugles of baked earth. This dress was established in the tribe's mythology and hedged about with the sanctions of religion.

The year 1871 was a bad one for the tribal people. In central India British officials were forcing the Baigas to commit the sin of lacerating the breasts of Mother Earth with the plough, thus throwing them into a psychological confusion from which they have never fully recovered. In Orissa other officials were persuading the Juangs to change their costume. A meeting was held and some two thousand pieces of cloth were distributed, after which the leaves were gathered in a heap and burnt. 'Persuasion' continued and a majority of Juangs took to putting on filthy rags instead of the beautiful and hygienic leaf-dress.

The futility of introducing the outward garb of civilization without doing anything to instil its spirit is seen in the effect this had on the Juangs, who still look back to the day when the sacred leaves were burnt as a conquered nation might recall the day of its defeat.

Since that time, the Juangs say, Sat—the spirit of truth and religion, the power to live safely in a world of hostile magic—has left the tribe. Tigers attack the cattle with impunity and the offended earth gives but a scanty crop.

This may seem odd today but to force improvement on very simple people without at the same time having an adequate programme of development to make their lives fuller, richer and happier can be disastrous and I was deeply disturbed by what I saw in the Juang hills and wrote strongly about it.

I have spoken of the extraordinary aesthetic experience of a genuine dance of the Juangs in the old style.

Long ago Dalton wrote splendidly about their 'animal ballet', and the dances which I saw again and again in 1943 were very like those he saw in 1866. Some of the women were still wearing their leaf-dress all the time, and they all put it on for ceremonial and special occasions. I do not know whether the custom still remains or how far they are maintaining their traditional ballet today, for one of the saddest things about the march of civilization into the forests is the way it kills so many forms of artistic expression. But when I saw it, the dancing was still adept and beautiful beyond words. The bright green leaves threw into relief the golden-brown bodies of the girls, whose beauty was so gracefully displayed. I specially remember the peacock and deer dances when the girls moved with the grace of the loveliest of all the creatures of the forest. They imitated the elephant and the vulture well too, and

when they squatted on the ground like quails to peck up their food their movements were as characteristic as they were rhythmical.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, always a most successful explorer, had paid a visit to the Gadabas and Bondos while I was in Bastar and had written to me with enthusiasm of the beauty of the country and the attractiveness of the people. Once I had finished work on my book about the Muria dormitory, and encouraged by my experiences among the Juangs, I decided to extend my interest to the Ganjam and Koraput Districts of Orissa. On my first trip I was escorted by a large, friendly, generous-hearted timber-man, Val Blackburn, who lived in Raipur. He took me into the very wild and almost unexplored country of the Kuttia Konds. A little later, we climbed the Nimgiri mountain together and, later still, I made the first of several visits to the high Bondo plateau and at the same time made some study of the neighbouring Gadabas. Later, I moved across to the Saora country in Parlakimedi and Gunupur, quite the most lovely tribal area that I have ever seen anywhere. Here I found, in Gilbert Murray's phrase, 'the apple tree, the singing, and the gold'.

Touring, however, was already becoming more expensive, though not so ruinously so as it is today, and it became evident that to remain in the private sector would greatly hamper my work. I had made friends with some of the Orissa officials, who were very suspicious at first on account of my political opinions, but later evidently became convinced that I was not up to anything, and I was finally appointed Hon. Anthropologist to Orissa on an honorarium which covered my expenses. Long afterwards the late Mr S. Fazl Ali told me that when he was Governor of Orissa he had decided to invite me to be Adviser for Tribal Affairs for the State but, just as he was going to put the matter through, he heard that I had been sent by the Prime Minister to NEFA.

I will now give brief descriptions of three of the tribes I visited—the Kuttia Konds, the Bondos and the Saoras. They are not 'anthropological' descriptions and the reader who wants a detailed account must go elsewhere. It may perhaps be questioned whether what I say here and the NEFA tribes has a legitimate place in an autobiography. I think it has. The tribes were such an important part of my life and brought so much interest and pleasure into it that without them, without the Baigas and Murias, the Bondos, Konds and Saoras, my story would be incomplete.

The Kuttia Konds

The Konds are a large tribe, speaking a Dravidian language akin to Gondi, who are scattered all over Orissa, but the Kuttia Konds are confined to the desolate hills and forests in the north-western corner of the Ganjam District. These Kuttias were very poor, very timid, strikingly good-looking and, once you got to know them, charming and loyal friends.

They had a good deal of cause for their timidity. They were grossly oppressed by Dom moneylenders and Patro landlords; they had a hard time from the officials of the Forest Department; their simplicity made them fair game for any rascally merchant or black-marketeer who adventured into their hills; and they lived in an area where wild animals made frequent attacks on their lives and property.

During my first visit to their hills, a Kond, who was carrying my mail down to the railway, was killed by a tiger and next morning, when we went to the spot, all we could find was a pool of blood and my letters scattered about the jungle. Wild elephants also were a constant danger and did great damage to the crops. Sometimes on tour we moved as a sort of convoy, all sorts of people joining our party for protection through a dangerous tract.

The Konds were constantly shifting their villages, which they built in such inaccessible places that there was often no level spot for us to make a camp. Like the Baigas, they were passionately devoted to the practice of axe-cultivation, though they were much more careful than the Baigas in observing a rotation so as not to ruin the forest permanently. Each village had perhaps a dozen traditional sites to which it shifted in turn when the available forest in the neighbourhood had been exhausted. Their houses were very small, often with tiny doors. Once when I was camping in one of their huts, the door was so low that I had to crawl in and out on my hands and knees.

The villages, however, were often very picturesque. They were usually laid out in two long rows of houses, each joined to its neighbour. In the middle, standing up impressively against the sky, was a forked pillar of sacrifice with buffalo horns placed on its points. The stone of Mother Earth stood in front of three other stones which served it as a protecting wall. Often there was an elaborately carved pillar of sacrifice, decorated with such relics as a buffalo's skull, the tail of a barking-deer, sambhar bones or a buffalo's hoof. The villages were usually kept spotlessly clean.

Even in 1944 the desire for human sacrifice was fundamental to Kond psychology. It will be remembered that, about a hundred years ago, the Government put an end to the savage Meriah sacrifices—human beings, who were offered to the Earth Goddess in order to fertilize the soil. It was hard to believe that these simple inoffensive folk could ever have practised so barbarous a rite or could even now long so greatly for its restoration. But it was so. In almost every village, hidden away in a priest's house, were the old implements of sacrifice—the knife, the chains, the bowl to catch the blood—and the priests told me how at certain seasons when the moon was full they could hear these horrid tools weeping for the human blood which was now denied them.

There were still carefully treasured a few human skulls, perhaps a hundred years old, or bits of human bone, which were brought out at special ceremonies or used as amulets. A great hunter, who had a bit of finger bone, told me that he attributed all his luck in the chase to his possession of it.

Long ago, when the Meriah sacrifice was put down by Government, the Konds began to sacrifice buffaloes in place of human victims. When this was done, an old human skull or mask was brought out and laid before the symbols of divinity.

The Konds were devotedly attached to that 'vile weed' of which Charles Lamb used to speak so eloquently. The boys made excellent tobacco-tubes, decorated with patterns of lozenges and triangles. Their legend of the origin of tobacco is told all over tribal India, even in NEFA. There was once a very ugly girl whom no one would marry. She did her best to get a husband, but no one wanted her. In despair she went to the Creator and begged to be allowed to die, and to return in her next birth as something which all men would love. He granted her request and after her death caused a tobacco plant to grow out of her despised body. And so the girl whom nobody wanted is now the desire of all the world.

The Kuttia Konds had nothing—and everything.

The Bondos

The Bondos are a small tribe of the type now often called Austro-Asiatic which—at the time of the 1941 Census— numbered only 2565 persons. Their country, elevated, beautiful and remote, lies north-west of the Machkund river. Notorious for their violent and inhospitable ways, they have preserved themselves comparatively unaffected by the march of civilization. Indeed by plainsmen and officials the Bondos are regarded as entirely savage, almost as the classic savage type: the strange dress and appearance of the women with their exiguous skirts and shaven heads, the passionate and homicidal temper of the men, their unfamiliar tongue, the inaccessibility of their abode, have long separated them from their mild and conventional neighbours. I do not know what has happened to them in recent years, but when I visited them for the last time in 1947, the only change I found was in their reaction to myself: by now suspicion had given way to an almost overwhelming friendliness.

The end of 1943 was, of course, a bad time to get about. All maps were, very properly, controlled by the military authorities, and so I had very little idea of where anything was. Food, with equal propriety, was strictly rationed, and for a traveller to obtain the necessary permits involved endless waiting about in dreary offices. Rations were issued by the week, but I needed supplies for several months. There was no regulation, the matter would have to be referred to Cuttack, what was the real purpose of my visit?

Many things were not available at all. The absence of tinned foods did not worry me, for I detest the stuff, but condensed milk was a necessity in a part of the world where milk was taboo. And of course there was no petrol.

To reach the Bondo country, if there was no petrol to drive your car, involved a train-journey from Calcutta to Vizianagram, and then a ninety-mile trip by country bus through lovely scenery to Koraput. The road winds steeply through the hills, and many of the passengers were sick. At Koraput the chief official had been a contemporary of mine at Oxford, but did not think it necessary to look after me, and I was accommodated in a sleazy dak-bungalow with broken windows. Sitting among the rats and fleas, I recollected with satisfaction that my fellow-collegian had taken a poor Third in History.

In the India of that time, unless you were an official, rich, or had unimpeachable or intimidating introductions, no one took very much notice of you. This was evident when we continued our journey for the further fourteen miles to Jeypore where a sumptuous guest-house was maintained by the Maharaja. Here everybody settled down to make my further progress as difficult as possible. In later years, I am glad to say, the local people were as helpful as they were then obstructive.

We first had to reach a place called Govindapalle, forty miles away. There was a bus, but it was not running that week: the proprietor's nephew was getting married. I waited several days and then put my stores and equipment on a couple of bullock-carts, a mode of travel which I have always rather enjoyed. Its one disadvantage is that it exposes you to interrogations: who was I, what was I doing, what was my aim in going to the Bondos?—everybody wanted to know. However, we reached our first Bondo village safely, but there discovered that no one was willing to go with us up into the hills. The Bondos were not used to carrying other people's loads—and who could blame them? It took a long time and much persuasion to get a dozen porters. But we did get them in the end, and one glorious morning climbed the steep hills to an enchantingly situated village, Dumiripada, on the top of the world.

It was beautiful, it was romantic, but it was not hospitable. There was no hostility: crowds of men, women and children thronged round as we put up a few leafy branches to make some sort of hut; they all beamed amiably, but no one would move a finger to help. Requests for wood and water, on extravagant payment, were met by charming smiles—but no action followed. The headman came, and he did his best, but Bondo headmen have little authority. At last, after tremendous argument

Bondo girl picking castor-seeds

and much shouting among themselves, a few boys brought just enough water for the kitchen.

The Bondos, in fact, are remarkably unwilling to oblige. They are prepared to sit round in the friendliest fashion, laughing, joking and chatting, so long as you do not ask them to do anything. They are always ready to give information. But they object very much to giving anything else. They have no apparent desire to earn money. At one village I offered some boys who had nothing whatever to do the equivalent of three days' earnings to catch some fish for me, but they refused. They dislike selling any of their possessions, and to live off the country here is a real problem. This was not a cause of irritation, for why should they do anything? But it was a practical difficulty.

Such help as we got came from an unexpected source. I have had the privilege of knowing a good many murderers, but hitherto most of these had been in jail. In the Bondo country, where the homicide rate is the highest in all India, murder is usually punished by a comparatively short sentence of five or seven years, and I found that the most affable and helpful people were those who had done time, even though I was sometimes apprehensive that one of them might feel the need of a little further practice. A further advantage was that these charming if ferocious ex-convicts usually knew some Hindi or Oriya, and we were therefore able to converse with them direct instead of through an interpreter.

Our next village, Bandapada, was very timid. As I went down the street, mothers seized their children and hurried them indoors, girls fled whimpering with fright, doors banged, fowls and pigs scurried to safety, one youth hastily got up a tree. Only a few old men, greatly daring, came to greet us. I can endure any hardship other than the realization that I look like a sort of ogre. Later I heard that it was supposed that I had come to take girls for the war, that I was going to send all the children to America to be baptized, and—most curious of all—that I was an Excise Officer who had come to introduce Prohibition. After a time, however, a delightful person, who had twice been to prison for successive murders and, as far as I could discover, was even then planning a third, turned up and with his help we got some kind of roof over our heads and a meagre supply of necessities.

I then brought out the gramophone, which is usually a great success. No sooner, however, had I put on a rather dreadful record entitled

'Fun with the Concertina', which I regret to say is everywhere in great demand, than one old woman fell down in a fit, several others flopped to the ground in an attitude of worship, and all the children ran screaming from the place. A deputation of elders quickly arrived to ask me to stop the music, if that is the correct word, as it was evident that there was something very dangerous inside the sound-box and they did not want to take any risks.

In the Bondo and Saora villages I departed from my usual custom of staying in someone's house and instead we made little huts for ourselves.

These were of leafy branches with a deep layer of straw underfoot and a rough thatch above. They were surprisingly comfortable but unfortunately they were edible and almost every night cattle would come and start eating the walls, which was a constant disturbance.

On later visits I had a very pleasant time with the Bondos. On one of them Shamrao with his wife and two small children, Suresh and Ramula, accompanied me and on my last trip I had Victor Sassoon, who enjoyed himself thoroughly and took a large number of first-class photographs, some of which I reproduced in my book, *Bondo Highlander.*

And the Bondos were well worth photographing, for on the whole they are a good-looking people. Boys and young men are often most attractive. Their fine carriage, magnificent physique, free and open countenance, delightful smile, are captivating. The way they do their hair is specially charming. As they grow older, however, they degenerate a little; the face coarsens, the body is dirtier, the hair is done in a different, and less pleasing, fashion. Like most tribesmen above a certain age, the Bondos let themselves go. In jail, they look terrible.

The Bondo sexual tradition was very different from the Muria. To the Bondos sexual experience was difficult, dangerous and expensive; while the Gond or Baiga often thought of intercourse as little more than a pleasant experience, the Bondo regarded it as a very serious matter. There were several reasons for this. The Bondo youth was bound by the most rigorous taboos from having anything to do with the girls of his own village; when he met the girls of other villages, he did so in public and under conditions of the strictest conventionality. This placed an effective brake on those casual everyday affairs which were the normal recreation of village boys in other parts of India. Then again sexual intercourse was a risky matter; it involved the introduction of the most precious of life's possessions into an unknown and alien

world. This was something fundamental in the psychology of the tribe; the Bondo could not bear going abroad. That was his real torment in jail; that was why he was so unwilling to carry our baggage to another village—I once saw a group of women weeping in utter despair because a member of the household was carrying some of my things to a place only four miles away. Like other tribesmen, the Bondos had the strange and sinister legend of the Vagina Dentata, which is closely connected with the fear of castration. These legends, which I have found among many Indian tribes and which have also been recorded in North America and from the Ainus, were entirely serious. They were not just dirty stories calculated to raise a hiccoughing chuckle in the dormitory; they were the attempt of Bondo fiction to suggest the risk of sexual congress.

But the most potent influence against promiscuity was that the girls would not have it. It is generally admitted in other tribal societies—and I believe it is largely true—that it is the girls who lead men on. But this was not true of the Bondo girls. To them sexual intercourse in the pre-marital period implied a serious intention; it was almost equivalent to a betrothal. The Saora youth drove an arrow between breasts carved in wood on the pillar of the house where his beloved lived; after that she was his. But if the Bondo youth translated this symbolism into actuality, he was caught: he was hers.

All this was characteristic of the eastern group of tribes, who were remarkable for their sexual reticence. The Saoras had the same outlook, so did the Juangs, Gadabas and Marias. But the Gond group had a very different tradition. The Gonds, Pardhans, Konds and other allied tribes regarded the expression of sexual passion, however delightful it might be, as a comparatively trivial affair, to be indulged as a passing entertainment, unimportant (provided certain conventions were observed) in its effects. This does not mean that they do not fall in love; they do, deeply and disastrously; but they found it possible at the same time and in a different compartment, as it were, to enjoy sex without getting too much involved.

Bondo life was marked by courage, freedom, equality, independence and industry. The defects of these qualities were equally evident; courage became an indifference to human life, freedom and independence degenerated into ill-mannered aggressiveness, too strong a sense of equality could become bad citizenship. The Bondo drank too much; he

was often lazy and drove his womenfolk too hard; he was not very clean; he wasted a lot of time in the exact, and rather fussy, performance and repetition of ceremonial. But otherwise there was a great deal to be said for him. If he was a savage, he was at least a noble savage. If he was poor, he was at least patient and courageous in his poverty. If he was outside, and perhaps behind, the main stream of civilization, he was at least free of many of its debasing vices.

In a hotel where I stayed at Chiengmai in northern Thailand there was a notice announcing that young ladies and 'excessive persons' were not admitted into the rooms at night. The Bondos attracted me because they were excessive persons, and after all Blake once said that 'the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom'.

The Saoras

My study of the Saoras extended over seven years. I concentrated on one section of this very large tribe, the Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput, and particularly of the villages in the hills above Gunupur, which at that time were almost completely untouched by missionary or other external influence and where it was possible to see the old life as it must have continued for hundreds of years.

To these I went from Patangarh to stay long periods and often made my camp in one village for two or three weeks at a time. I took my books and papers with me and settled down as though I were at home. In fact, I wrote a good deal of my book about the Saoras on the spot, and was able to correct or verify things as I went along. The people were very good to me and used to make me charming little two-roomed huts of branches and leaves, with good verandas. The quickest way to their hearts was by gifts of country-cigars called *pikas*. For these they had, and I hope still have, a passionate attachment. They were also very fond of tea and were constantly dropping in for a cup or two. I often had half a dozen people round my bed soon after dawn anxious to share my morning tea.

Yet in my day at least, the Saoras did not really want to have visitors. After any outsider had been to the village they made special sacrifices to purify the place from any possible magical defilement. In one area I found a regular tariff: for a Forest Officer they sacrificed a goat, for a Sub-Inspector of Police a fowl, and for an anthropologist a large black pig.

They had a god called Sahibosum, who was propitiated for the express purpose of keeping touring officials away. A sahib, of course, is anything in a hat and a pair of trousers. Wooden images were made and erected outside the village. There was also an image of the 'Memsahib' goddess, usually just a little larger and more formidable than her husband. She was always represented as wearing a sola topi.

There was nothing personal about this. Even your best friends would make these sacrifices and erect these images. It was simply that if you came from the outside world you might bring, clinging invisibly to you, some sort of spiritual infection; a spirit or demon might use you as a vehicle to get inside the charmed village boundaries.

In spite of this, I managed to visit almost all the hill Saora villages and in some of them I felt like an explorer, for those in the remoter parts of the hills had not been visited in living memory by any outsider, and for months at a time I did not meet any official: Sahibosum had clearly been effective. I was there in the cold and also when it was very hot, indeed at all times of the year except the height of the rains.

The beauty of the country was almost overwhelming. When I was younger I had a feeling for Nature akin to that of the young Wordsworth. Natural beauty haunted me like a passion. It was 'an appetite; a feeling and a love' that had no need for any interest 'unborrowed from the eye'.

But I think that from the very beginning of my time in tribal India I moved on to Wordsworth's further stage of hearing oftentimes 'the still, sad music of humanity' against the background of Nature. This was particularly true of my years in Bastar.

Later, in NEFA among the northern mountains, their mystery and grandeur disturbed me with the sense of the universal presence, 'the joy of elevated thoughts', of which Wordsworth writes again.

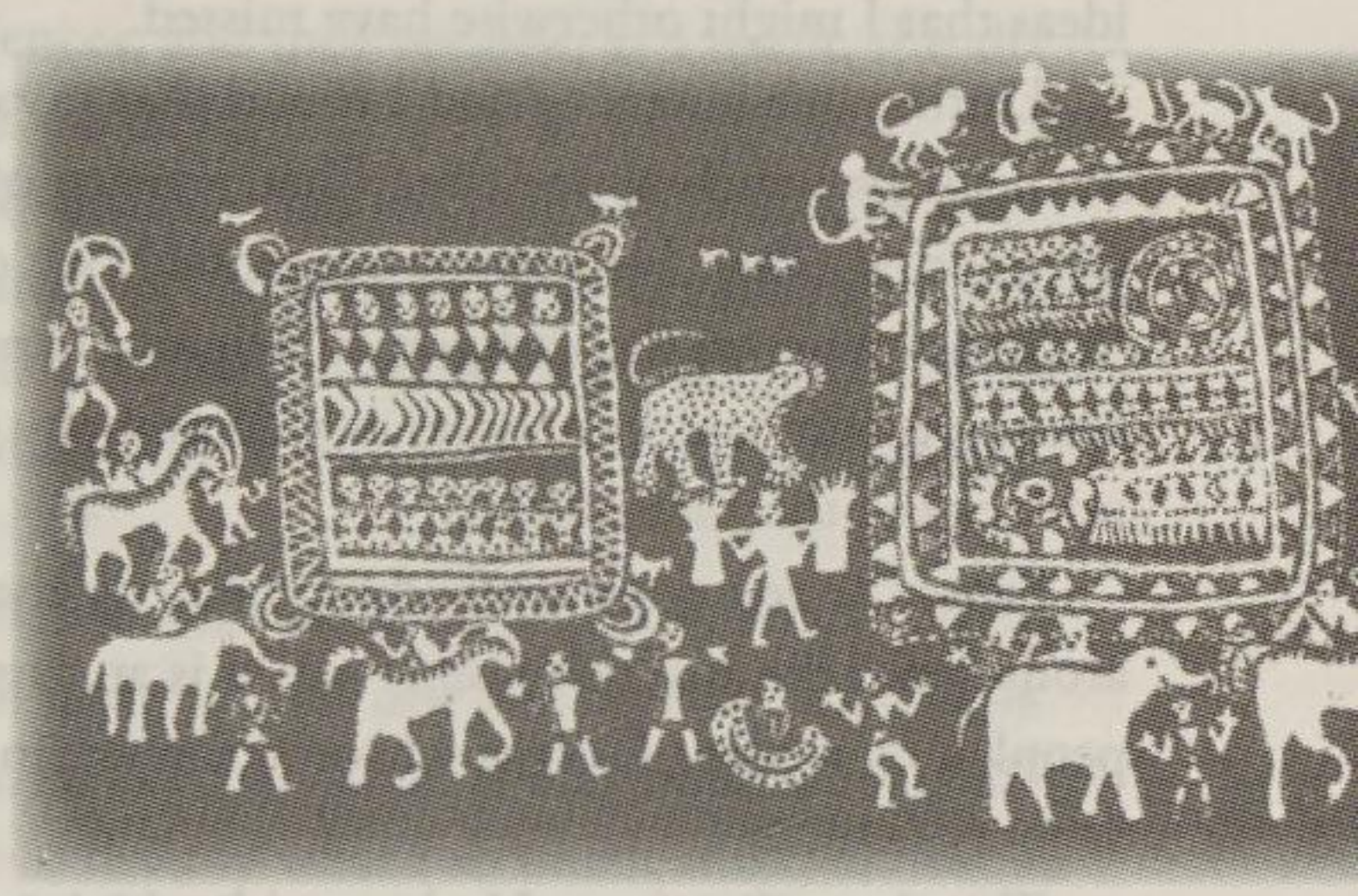
But in the Saora hills the appeal of Nature was largely sensuous. It was, it is true, always a setting for human beings and yet its impact was almost physical. I ached for it and when I had to leave it, it was always with a very heavy heart.

The Hill Saoras had large substantial villages; they erected menhirs and sacrificed buffaloes for their dead; their religious needs were served by male and female shamans; they engaged in both terraced and shifting cultivation; their men put on a long brightly-coloured loin-cloth and their women wore a handwoven brown-bordered skirt and did not usually wear

anything else; the women also greatly enlarged the lobes of their ears and had a characteristic tattoo mark down the middle of the forehead. They retained their own language and very few of them spoke any other.

Saora houses were well-built and in long streets, and some Saora chieftains were comparatively wealthy. Indeed, they might all have been fairly well-to-do, so laborious and careful were they, had it not been for the shocking exploitation to which they were subjected by their landlords and moneylenders.

It was a heart-breaking sight to stand by a Saora's threshing-floor and watch his creditors and parasites remove in payment of their dues so much of the grain which he had laboured so hard to produce.



The great achievement of the Saoras is their terracing. They build up the hillsides for a thousand feet, terrace rising above terrace, perfectly aligned, so carefully done that not a drop of water escapes uselessly and all erosion is checked. Sometimes a great stone wall, 15 feet high, will hold up a ridge of cultivable soil only three feet wide. These terraces have been rightly praised as works of great engineering skill.

The main subject of my study was Saora religion, for the Saoras are quite the most religious people I have ever met. Happily, they did not resent my inquiries but were rather flattered by them. Where other tribes postpone a festival or ceremony if a visitor comes to the village, the Saoras used to insist on my presence at everything. They took me into their houses, made me sit on the floor near the officiating priest and explained it all in great detail as the long ceremonies took their course.

In fact we used to have a saying that there was never a holiday for the anthropologist in the Saora country. Every day something happened. You were just settling down to a quiet siesta when you would hear the roar of gunfire echoing in a neighbouring valley, and you knew there was a funeral which you simply must attend. Or someone would arrive at

dawn with news of a most exciting ceremony in a village five miles away and due to start in half an hour.

I was rather often ill in the Saora country, for malaria was a dangerous scourge there and I had some very bad bouts of toothache. Even this worked out well, for the priests and even the priestesses used to crowd in to my little hut, sit by my bedside and attempt to cure me by their own techniques. And cure or relieve me they often did, for their methods were extremely soothing and their affection and interest was reviving. I also learnt by personal experience a great deal about their ideas that I might otherwise have missed.

During this happy period I found that my old Oxford studies in theology, which at one time I had written off as wasted, were of unexpected value. Heiler's monumental book on prayer, for example, William James on the varieties of religious experience, Otto on the numinous element in religion as well as many other books helped me to understand the Saoras better.

Saora life was completely dominated by their religion. Beyond and around this life and this visible world is an unseen realm of vital reality, peopled by a host of spirits whose activities impinge on normal existence at every turn.

The ghosts live in an Underworld, which is something like this world of our own, but everything is on a Lilliputian scale. The houses are very small; the clouds lie low upon the land; it is always twilight under the infernal moon. The ghosts live a sad half-life, ill-fed and poorly clad, until they themselves die again and, if they are cremated in proper form, yanish from the misery of existence forever.

But the rulers of the Underworld, the tutelary spirits, do themselves well. They have large houses, the best of food and clothing and many servants. They keep tigers and leopards (as men keep dogs) as pets. The bear is the priest and the porcupine the medicine-man of this strange world.

It is the great desire of the tutelary spirits, both male and female, to find partners among the living. They come to them in dreams and beg them to marry them. There is a special class of girls who at the age of puberty have dreamt of these unearthly lovers and after a turbulent period of wooing have agreed to marry them.

The marriage is an elaborate affair, quite as elaborate and expensive as an ordinary marriage, and when it is over, the girl is a Kuranboi,

a priestess who henceforth will be able to do the work of divination and healing with the aid of her unseen husband. The Saoras believe that the girls can have children from these husbands, and I met many Saora women who had families both in this and in the other world. Sometimes, listening to the way they talked, I used to wonder which was the more real to them.

But in spite of the realm of fantasy in which they lived, these women were practical and devoted servants of their tribe. They were always ready to hasten to minister to the sick and console the sorrowful. Men also were subject to these experiences, and they became, as a result, the all-important medicine-men of the tribe.

The work of these simple 'doctors' had great survival value. It gave the patient the sense that someone cared about him. It made him believe that he was going to get well. It settled his conscience and gave him the will to recover. And the medicine-men took their profession seriously and worked very hard at it.

My memories of life in Bastar and Orissa are, like my memories of Oxford, inconsolable. I shall never see, no one will ever see, the Muria ghotul as I saw it, or the Saoras as I saw them. It may be that I myself helped by my very presence to destroy what I so much admired. But all over tribal India the old freedom is disappearing and with it something of the old happiness. Change is inevitable and I have no doubt that the great schemes of village welfare have brought some profit to some of the people already and in time will bring new life to them all. How far this will in the long run result in their happiness is a problem that vexes all those who think seriously on the subject.

A special, and very important, aspect of research is photography: this led me into many adventures, especially in the early days and the remoter regions, where it was by no means easy.

The camera to many tribal people is an object not only of embarrassment, but of fear. That mysterious aperture which points in their direction in so sinister a manner, the almost inevitable fuss and preparation that precedes the taking of even the simplest photographs, the fixing of the tripod, the manoeuvring for position, cannot fail to alarm them. In a bazaar in Mandla District I saw a rather photogenic blacksmith—it was when I was writing my book about the Agarias—but when I pointed my camera at him I was startled to see a wave of

fear pass over everybody within sight. The local constable came up to me, saluted smartly, and said, 'I can get you a much better man than that,' but before I realized what he meant the whole bazaar was on the move. People leapt to their feet upsetting the stalls, throwing baskets of vegetables to the ground, trampling on bales of cloth, and in a few moments they were all streaming away into the jungle. I later discovered that even the constable supposed that my camera was a sort of anthropometric instrument by which I could measure the stature of likely recruits for the Army. Another time in the Raipur District, people trembled with fear while I was photographing them and afterwards one of them said, 'You have taken all my strength and shut it up in that little box.' In another place I found that the people supposed the camera to be a sort of X-ray instrument with which I could see right through their clothes and bodies down to their livers. Everybody knows, of course, that the liver is a very important thing in black magic. You try to affect the person's liver as a preliminary to murdering him by witchcraft. If you can get hold of a bit of the liver of a dead man or even a picture of it, it is a very potent source of supernatural power.

In Bastar, when I was making a documentary film of the Murias and Marias, I found, on the whole, that they were very good about letting me photograph them and I was often astonished at the willingness of even the children to come before the camera. But sometimes the luck was bad. I once went to photograph a Muria wedding; in fact, I was invited to go by the father of the bride, who was an old friend. For the first day everything went swimmingly. We exchanged presents: we were allowed to see everything that went on: I have seldom been in a more friendly company of people. I was able to get a number of excellent pictures. Then, on the morning of the second day, the bridegroom had a fit. I was standing nearby with my ubiquitous camera in my hand. My heart sank. I knew what would happen. Gradually, inevitably, the eyes of the entire company turned to me. I knew what they were thinking: that queer little box had brought the wrath of the

gods on the bridegroom. After a few minutes the boy's mother, a very forceful woman with a mass of false hair curled up and up on the top of her head (she was said to be an incarnation of the god Mahadeo), declared to my face that it was the camera that had troubled her son. There was nothing to be done. The atmosphere was ruined. After that, even though I put the camera away, whenever people saw me they looked embarrassed and awkward. I felt as though I had indeed a black monkey sitting on my back.

Sometimes local subordinates or helpful friends can be equally embarrassing. Once in Sarangarh I had succeeded, with a lot of trouble, in getting a group of villagers natural and at ease, just ready for a good picture, when a zealous chaprasi rushed up exclaiming 'How dare you sit in that casual manner in front of the Sahib!'

I had similar experiences in NEFA, and among such highly photogenic people as the Boris and Wanchos I had to put my camera away entirely when I visited most of their villages. I never had any difficulty, however, among the Buddhist tribes along the frontier.

The Earth is Round

In the twenty-two years of forest life before I came to Shillong, I tended, I think, to isolate myself a little too much from the outside world. I dodged conferences and committees, though I corresponded fairly widely with other scholars in the same field. I did, however, go fairly regularly to Bombay, once a year in the rains, in order to raise funds for our tribal work and, as I love travelling, I made a few trips abroad. People in Bombay were extraordinarily generous and kind and I had a large number of friends there, chief of whom was Jehangir Patel.

J.P. Patel is a Mr Pickwick of a man. When I first met him he was a businessman beginning to do well in cotton. Then he came in touch with Gandhi and entertained him in Juhu after one of his fasts. Later, not content with helping us in our work in Patangarh, he started an admirable institution for the very oppressed Warlis in the Thana district. He organized a number of Forest Cooperatives and opened dispensaries

and schools. He finally crowned his achievements by marrying Sophie, a Spanish lady, whom one day he brought home in triumph to Bombay. During the past fifteen years he has helped me in every possible way to collect funds for Patangarh, to publish my books, and to introduce me to a wide circle of friends. His sane and wise advice has always stood me in good stead.

Perhaps my earliest friends in Bombay were the Macleans, who had a house in the Gowalia Tank Road where I used to stay in the Christa Seva Sangh days. John Maclean was a professor of mathematics at the Wilson College, and he and his wife kept open house for Indians: they were both strongly sympathetic to the national movement. Another missionary friend was the late Margaret Moore, a devout but very witty woman: years afterwards she paid us a visit at Karanjia and enjoyed it.

The Inter-Religious Fellowship often met in the Macleans' house, and here I got to know C.J. Shah, who produced a fine history of Jainism but later went into business. He accompanied me on my mission of inquiry in Gujarat, and we have now been friends for over thirty years.

After going to Karanjia I came to know the Davids: Meyer the eldest; Wilfrid who wrote the sensational *Monsoon* and stayed some days with us in Karanjia; the lovely and always entertaining Florence, and their mother Mrs David herself. Like the other old Jewish families I have known intimately, they were generous and hospitable to a fault, and gave us a great deal of support and encouragement in those early days.

Bombay is for me a place of many friendly memories, and I had contacts of very varied kinds. Among the politicians were M.R. Jayakar, a great lawyer and orator: Bhulabhai Desai, of whom I was very fond; K.F. Nariman, Purshottamdas Tricumdas, B.G. Kher and others. Among journalists were D.F. Karaka with whom I had Oxford ties; Shamlal of the *Times of India*; Shaun Mandy, the delightful Irishman who edited the *Illustrated Weekly of India* for many years; and above all Frank and Beryl Moraes. I have known Frank's son Dom since he was a baby and as he grew up he used to give me copies of his early poems.

I never went to Bombay without making a pilgrimage to Bandra to see Hilla Vakil. One of J.P. Patel's closest friends, whom he shared with me, is Wasant Velinkar, whose gift for humorous conversation makes him a joy to know.

There were many people connected with Bombay House and the Tata enterprises in general, some of whom I have already mentioned. I

have always had a special link with dear Pilloo Vesugar. I got to know Jamshed Bhabha and his wife Betty very well when I was working on the history of Jamshedpur, and other honoured friends are Jamshed's brother Homi, the nuclear energy expert, and K.A.D. Naoroji. Homi Mody, and the late Ardeshir Dalai; each took the chair at our annual meetings as did another old friend, M.C. Chagla. J.A.D. Naoroji, Soona Batliwalla and John Matthai were close friends whom death has taken from us.

For many years I have stayed during visits to Bombay with my publisher Roy Hawkins. An open-hearted and thoughtful host, an entertaining companion, he has always made a special appeal to me by his gifts as a listener. Too often, when I meet people, I can't get a word in edgewise, but Hawk not only leads one on with appropriate questions, but even listens to the answers. And, as a result perhaps of going through the proofs of so many of my books, he has become really interested in the tribes. His affection for me has even stood up to reading all the unfavourable reviews which, as publisher, he forwards to me, the worst passages carefully marked in red pencil. 'I like my friends to have plenty of faults,' he once told me, 'for then I don't feel oppressed by them.'

An earlier host was Evelyn Wood, a very old friend who has always had a cathartic effect, helping me to clear my mind of cant. His first wife Maeve did a drawing of me in 1942 which is reproduced in this book.

Later, I also had experience of life in Calcutta. Until 1946 anthropology was a subsection of the Zoological Survey of India—man prostrate at the feet of the other animals—and there was a Special Officer, Dr B.S. Guha, who worked as Anthropologist attached to the Survey. In that year, however, an Anthropological Survey (later to be known as the Department

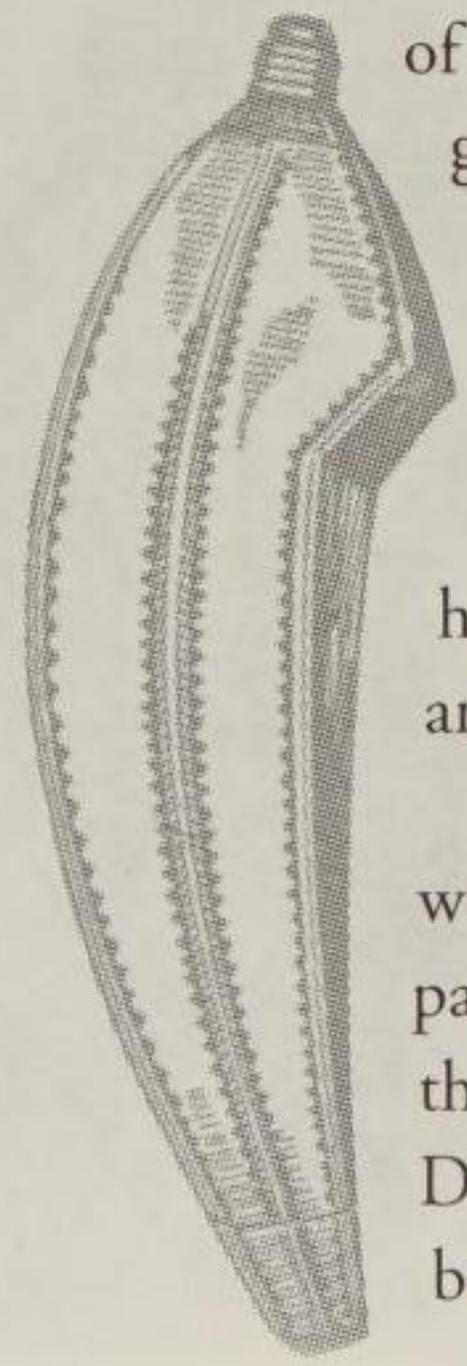
The Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, on the balcony of his Calcutta home, 1949 (Sunil Janah)

of Anthropology) was established by the Government of India and Guha became its first Director. He invited me to join him for a time as Deputy Director to help to get it started. It was agreed that I should retain close relations with Patangarh where Shamrao would carry on, and accordingly I went to Banaras where the Survey was then stationed.

I lived in Banaras for over a year and had I not been able to go out frequently on tour in the tribal hills, I doubt if I could have stood it. The atmosphere was academic in the worst sense—there were quarrels and jealousies; very little work was done; Banaras Cantonment, where we lived, was devastatingly tedious—and it was a great relief when the Survey was shifted to Calcutta.

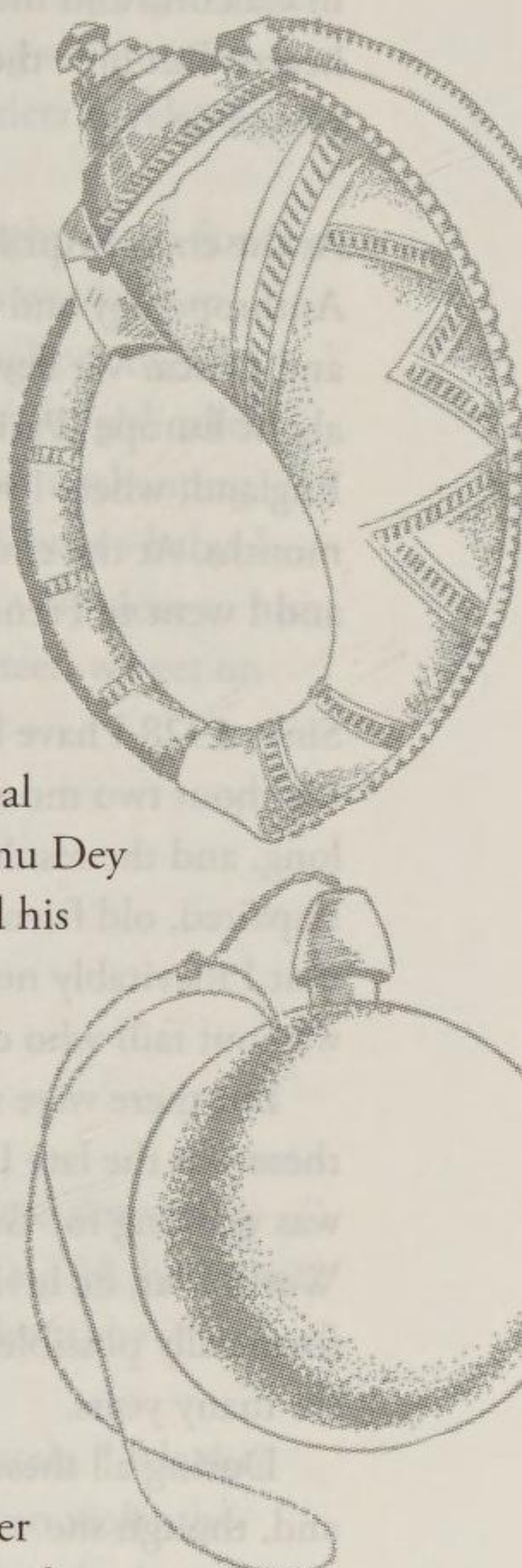
In Calcutta we got a pleasant flat at the top of a house in Park Street, No. 64. The Survey's office was in the Indian Museum in Chowringhee and conveniently near at hand. This was the first and only time in my life when I have gone physically from a house to an office. I spent just about a year in Calcutta with a good deal of time out on tour in the Bondo and Saora areas of Orissa, in South India and in Assam. At the end of my contract Guha was anxious for me to stay on but I was not happy in the atmosphere of the Department and I longed to return to the village. Two or three years later I was officially asked to return as Director but I still felt that this was not my job and everything that has happened since has convinced me that I was right.

Calcutta, however, gave me some lifelong friends. I have never had a friend quite like Victor Sassoon, affectionate, liberal, witty, a man of exceptional quality. He is the best of companions and brought a great enlargement into my life. It was due to him that I was able to see something of Europe and make two visits to Africa and it was due to him also that I was able, for once in my life, to eat good food while it was still possible to obtain it.



His brother Joe was another good friend and the beautiful house that the Sassoons owned in Middleton Street was almost an extra home to us.

Then there were Minnie and Lindsay Emmerson, association with whom has meant more and more to me as the years have passed. Ever since I knew him Lindsay has been on the staff of the *Statesman* newspaper (other special friends on this paper are Desmond Doig and Niranjan Mazumder) and later, Minnie became Principal of the Bethune College; they have been my



generous hosts on many occasions. They always have the latest books, the most recent information and the most amusing stories, and to go to their house is a treasured experience. Minnie's sister Sheila, the artist, and her husband John Auden (brother of W.H.) were other friends, and in Bombay there was another sister, the delightful Indira.

While we were in Calcutta Victor was running a picture agency which he called Tropix. He did the writing and Sunil Janah, whom I do not hesitate to call the greatest photographer in India, used to take the pictures. At that time Sunil was unmarried but later he was lucky enough to win the beautiful and talented Sobha. Then there were Jamini Roy, Gopal Ghose, Ratin Moitra and other artists, poets like Bishnu Dey and, above all, Sudhin Dutta, his wife Rajeshwari, and his charming brother Subul. Sudhin's comparatively early death (he was only fifty-nine) robbed India of a major poet and me of a precious friend.

During my year in Calcutta I became a member of the Council of the Asiatic Society (which was then called the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal) and was elected a Fellow, one of the most jealously guarded honours in the country. It brought me in contact with many Indian scholars, among whom I particularly treasure Suniti Chatterji, a unique character among India's learned men. I was also elected a Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India and was twice member of its Council.

Since coming to Shillong, I have often been to Calcutta but nearly always on my way somewhere else, with the result that my visits have been brief and overcrowded, with little chance to make new friends. But among the few I did make, the chief were Bob and Margot Gilkey and their lovely children, David, John and Sharada. Bob was in the USIS, a learned man (he has written, in French, a large treatise on comparative literature) with the kindest eyes you ever saw; and Margot, a shy and too-modest poet, has in addition to her gifts of heart and mind a breath-taking beauty. Lila and I stayed with them in their air-conditioned flat

in Calcutta and they stayed with us and completely won the children's hearts. But now they have gone away, as people in official positions always do.

At the end of April 1949 I said goodbye to the Department of Anthropology and a week later set off with Victor on a visit to Europe and Africa. We flew by Pan American to Brussels and then travelled about Europe (Paris, Venice, Rome) for a fortnight, finally reaching England, where I stayed with my mother and Eldyth for a couple of months. At the end of this time, at the beginning of August, Victor and I went to French West Africa (AOF).*

Since 1928 I have been to Europe four times, staying on each occasion for about two months. Eight months in thirty-four years is not very long, and the result has been that my links with Oxford have been impaired, old friends have fallen into neglect, but worst of all, it meant that I inevitably neglected my mother (though I wrote to her every week without fail) who died a few years ago at the age of 89.

But there were some friends with whom I never lost touch. Closest of these was the late Laurence Housman who gave me a lot of help when I was working for Gandhi in the early years. Later, just before the Second World War, he invited Shamrao and me to England and made the visit financially possible. I carried on an animated correspondence with him for many years.

During all these years my sister Eldyth had been living with mother and, though she would never admit it, losing much of what life had to give in consequence. I have never met anyone so completely unselfish as Eldyth. Her whole life has been devoted to other people. Fortunately, even when mother was alive, since they lived in or near London, she was able to find interesting work as one of the Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, a job she has now been doing for many years. Eldyth visited us in Patangarh in 1939 just before the War, and again spent a very happy two months with us in Shillong during an official tour which took her all over India visiting mission stations and hospitals.

* Pub.: For reasons of space it was not possible to go into details of this trip or a subsequent one in 1950. Interested readers may refer for the typically Elwin vivid and gently humorous accounts of these journeys and those to Ceylon and Thailand in Chapter 7 of the complete Elwin autobiography.

In her own person, Eldyth illustrates one of Gandhi's sayings: 'True love is boundless like the ocean and, rising and swelling within one, spreads itself out and crossing all boundaries and frontiers envelops the whole world.'

Basil became a schoolmaster and for some time taught at the famous Cheam School, where one of his pupils was a boy who was later to become the Duke of Edinburgh. Since then he has taught at two or three other schools. He married an outstandingly beautiful girl called Helen; they now have three children who are, I am told, enchanting though I have only seen one of them and that when she was a baby. I have seen little of Basil and we seldom write, but I feel very close to him, for he is a man after my own heart and, when we do meet, we get on exceptionally well together.

Passage to NEFA

The years of research in Bastar and Orissa were happy and rewarding. Yet for a long time I had been thinking of Assam and Dr J.H. Hutton wrote me a detailed letter far back in the early forties about the possibilities of research there.*

All through 1953 I found that I was getting a little stale. I felt that I had explored central India rather thoroughly. I had been violently excited and equally frustrated by Assam, and the constant rise in prices and wages was making it very difficult for any private person to carry on research.

Suddenly at the beginning of December, like a call from heaven, as I was sitting in our house at Patangarh, a mysterious telegram arrived from New Delhi signed by somebody called FOREIGN, asking me to come immediately to sit on some Selection Board for NEFA. I knew nothing about the capital and my only knowledge of NEFA was that it was a place I was not allowed to visit. The telegram had been delayed a

* Pub.: Elwin visited the North-east twice—in 1947 and 1952—before his official involvement with NEFA began and spent time among the Aos, Konyaks, Phoms, and Kabuis.

week on the way, so there was very little time, and there was no letter to explain what it was about. After some agitated consultations with Lila and Shamrao I thought I had better go, and Lila and I went off together to Delhi as soon as we could.

Early in the morning, the day after we arrived, there was a summons from my mysterious friend Foreign, who turned out to be a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, T.N. Kaul.

Tikki Kaul is the kind of person whom you like at first sight, and within five minutes I felt that I had known him all my life. He told me that it had been decided to form a new cadre of officials (which was ultimately called the Indian Frontier Administrative Service), that I should help to select them, and that the Prime Minister had suggested that I should join the NEFA Administration to advise it on tribal problems.

The idea was so new to me that at first I did not know what to say. I felt like someone who, after being refused a sandwich, is suddenly offered a seven-course dinner. It would mean pulling up my roots in Patangarh but, on the other hand, it would open a very wide new field of work both for the welfare of the tribes and in research. I wired to Shamrao to come to Delhi and Lila, he and I had a long discussion and finally decided that I should accept the NEFA proposal, even though from Shamrao's point of view this was a very serious blow, for it meant that he would be left to carry on alone in Patangarh. But Shamrao has always been a person of singular unselfishness and he felt that this would be a good thing for me to do.

The move to NEFA, though I think something of the kind was a logical development and perhaps inevitable, meant a reversal of many of my original ideals. It meant going from a village that was over a hundred miles in the interior to live in a town, a small town it is true, and one in the heart of a tribal area, but still a town. It meant a regular income with comforts and amenities that I had never known before, and a corresponding loss of my former intimacy with the realities of poverty and exploitation. It meant a loss of freedom; one could no longer say exactly what one liked; one had to work to a programme: there were rules. It meant a decline in 'eccentricity', for since coming to Shillong my life has been tediously conventional.

In Delhi . . . I took my seat on the Selection Board to help choose the foundation members of what was to be the IFAS.

I was so keen on getting to NEFA and starting to tour during the winter months that I asked Tikki Kaul to let me leave the Selection Board early and I went back as quickly as possible to Patangarh and packed up. I had a feeling, a right feeling as it turned out, that this was going to mean drastic separation from the people I had known for so many years, and of whom I had grown so fond, and it was a real wrench to break away from Patangarh. But it had to be done and I went down to Calcutta where Victor Sassoon joined me, for he had offered to come and help us settle in Shillong, the beautiful but now overcrowded town in the Khasi Hills of Assam where the NEFA Administration has its headquarters. We flew up to Gauhati on 31 December 1953 and got to the Pinewood Hotel in Shillong just in time for the New Year Eve dinner. The next day I went to see the Governor and Rustomji, who was still Adviser, and began my new life. I was at first called Anthropological Consultant but after a year this was changed to Adviser for Tribal Affairs, which was more appropriate. I was not a regular Government servant, but was paid an honorarium and was at first on a three-year contract: this was renewed for another three, and then for another five, years. The post carries no pension but, though I may have to leave NEFA one day, I cannot imagine myself ever actually retiring.

Nari Rustomji is a unique character, one of the friendliest and kindest people you could meet in a lifetime, a man of great imagination and sympathy, with brains and an infectious vitality. On that first day he took me for a walk for several miles, most of it uphill, which meant that I was so breathless that I could not say a word, which was, I think, exactly what he wanted, for it gave him a chance to brief me, without interruption, at considerable length. Nari has a profound and essentially practical affection for the tribal people. He has an extraordinary flair for them as persons and his great love for and knowledge of music has helped to endear him to these music-loving folk. I do not think anybody has done more for Naga individuals or felt more deeply for them. His mother, 'Mummy Rustomji', who kept house for him for many years, is a warm, generous person. Very recently, just in time to get her into this book, Nari married the bewitching Avi Dalal.

A person who played a very large part in my life during my first few years in NEFA was the Governor, Mr Jairamdas Daulatram. We did not always agree, but our discussions added a spice to life and we were always held together by our common absorption in tribal problems. The

Governor was specially interested in tribal religion and never tired of asking questions about the people's attitude to the Supreme Being.

I was at first completely lost in Shillong. Apart from discussions with the Governor, of which there were a good many, and listening to Nari, there was not much to occupy me: nobody quite knew what to do with me. There was virtually no literature to study but I was given copies of old tour diaries. My very first 'case' concerned the library in the great Buddhist monastery at Tawang, which I suggested should be catalogued; three years later it was.

Nobody seemed anxious to become my stenographer; I could not even get a chaprasi. Had Victor not been with me, I doubt if I would ever have got anything. The two fundamental problems were a house and a car. We went house-hunting everywhere, for a long time without success, but finally discovered a large building on the outskirts of the town in a part called Nongthymmai. It was on a little hill and agreeably isolated among the pines. There was a cemetery opposite, which kept it quiet, and the approach-road was difficult, but this rather suited me. Here I could feel back in the forest.

After a lot of hesitation and strong prompting by Victor, who pointed out that there was room in this remarkable house for my museum collections and library as well as an office, I decided to rent it and Victor went down to Calcutta to fix up everything with the landlord, a distinguished barrister, A.C. Ganguly. For years we have had the happiest relations with him and his family, and his recent death was a real blow to us.

Victor also got us a car, a very old Rover. It once actually did the journey to Gauhati, when I went to fetch Lila and the children who joined me in Shillong when things were in some sort of order.

About this time I became an Indian citizen which I had been trying to be for a long time past and which I had been de facto from my early days in Sabarmati.

By the end of January I had collected my staff and started the office. We had even got a cook, whom Victor named 'the gourmet's dream'. My Khasi steno, who was a good scrounger, got me a comfortable chair and an office clock. For the first time in my life I began dealing with files. When I was in the Department of Anthropology I was engaged entirely in research work and I do not think that a file ever came my

way. It was not easy to adjust myself to the atmosphere of an office, to deal with audit objections or even the mechanical business of endorsing documents.

NEFA was fascinating for someone like myself who had lived a sheltered life in the forest for so long. There were contacts with the Army, Air Force, the whole official world, and the Assam Rifles, that very special force which polices the frontiers of north-eastern India.

In the middle of January a new Adviser, K.L. Mehta, arrived. For a long time I called him Ken, vaguely supposing that the 'K' in his initials stood for Kenneth. Later he told me that I must write Kan, short for Kanhaiya Lal, and I remarked that a single letter could change a name from one hemisphere to the other. Rustomji was transferred to Sikkim where he spent five very successful years as Diwan, returning to Shillong in 1959 for a second term as Adviser, and going on in the middle of 1963 to Bhutan.

Kan Mehta will be remembered as one of the great administrators of the tribal areas, and the idea of the 'single line administration', which was developed during his time, has excited the admiration of all visitors to NEFA. He had no previous experience of the tribal people but his quick and lively mind soon grasped their problems, and his intellectual generosity was such that he did not automatically oppose a policy simply because it was commended by someone else. This meant that we were able to work together harmoniously and *A Philosophy for NEFA*, which I worked out, owes a great deal to him. Kan's wife, Gisela, is a lovely person. In the five-and-a-half years that she was in Shillong I never once heard her say a nasty thing about anyone, and she was ideally fitted to hold together the various elements in the administration.

After an initial period of not having very much to do, once we had moved into the new house I found myself extremely busy. A training course was started for the newly recruited Political Officers and for two or three weeks we met daily in Raj Bhavan to hear lectures and hold discussions. I had to give four lectures on 'the tribal approach' which went over quite well. I noticed with gratification that at least one of the officers was taking me seriously, being assiduous in taking notes. I mentioned this to him at the end of the lectures and he said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, what I was really doing was composing dubious limericks.'

Then we also had the Hills and Plains Festival which for some reason was never repeated. For somebody new to Assam this was very exciting, for the tribal people from most of the Hill Districts attended it and parties from all over NEFA came down to dance and enjoy themselves. The Governor, Jairamdas Daulatram, gave a big lunch party on the lawns of Raj Bhavan and I was greatly struck by the way all the visitors mixed up together and the Governor himself sat on the ground between two of the NEFA tribal ladies. There was nothing of the atmosphere which I have met elsewhere, when at a party the officials are given chairs while the tribal people sit on the ground or where different kinds of food or cigarettes are given to the two classes of visitors.

At the end of January Kan and I snatched two days away from Shillong to make a first very hurried tour of NEFA. We left Shillong at four in the morning of a Sunday and got back late at night on the Monday, flying round to a number of places. This journey by air impressed on me the grandeur of the frontier mountains and the magnitude of our task.

From this time onward I divided my time between touring, research and evolution of policy. I discovered a completely new form of literary activity—noting on files—which is interesting, but has the drawback for a professional writer (when, as so often in NEFA, the noting has to be Secret or, Top Secret) of confining one's readers to one or two people. In fact, I achieved the Miltonic ideal—'Fit audience find though few', though sometimes I have wondered whether there was any audience at all.

The most important and the most enjoyable part of my work during these years has been the touring, to which I devote a separate chapter. Until very recently I was in the mountains for six or seven months every year.

The character of my research work changed, as it was bound to do. Formerly I had a great deal of time, freedom from preoccupations and I was able to settle down for long periods among the people. In NEFA I had to survey a vast tract of mountainous territory, some thirty-three thousand square miles in extent, and help to look after thirty or forty tribal groups. What I did, therefore, was to go out on tour for periods varying from three to six or seven weeks far into the interior, collect what sociological facts were possible, write reports on the general condition of the tribes and make suggestions to the Administration. I

have continued my interest in folklore and art but my main concern has been in what is called applied anthropology.

For several years I collected folktales on my tours, many of them strikingly original and nearly all quite unlike those in my other collections. When I had enough, I published a book, *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India,* which contains about four hundred of these stories.

I had also gradually been making extracts from the old literature about NEFA, of which there is a great deal more than is generally supposed, though most of it is buried in rare books which are very hard to come by. My *India's North-East Frontier in the 19th Century,* therefore, which was published by the Oxford University Press, I made a book of about five hundred pages contained a large number of extracts from the old explorers, missionaries and administrators who wrote between 1800 and 1900. The Administration agreed that we should publish my *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India* ourselves and I found this great fun.

The most widely-read of my books, however, was *A Philosophy for NEFA,* now in a third revised edition. Later I wrote a rather short book, about a hundred pages, on Nagaland, of which I was again both author and publisher. This was not a sociological study but dealt with the history and politics of this interesting part of the world. As a publication, it won a President's Award.

I was asked to give general direction to the work of a small Research Department. This had different sections—one for cultural, one for philological and a third for historical research. The department has since produced a number of books in all its different subjects. One of the things that distinguishes it and has greatly contributed to its output has been the fact that we have posted Research Officers in the interior so that they have to live among their people, relax in their company and spend virtually their whole time studying them. Outstanding among our officers is B. Das Shastri, a philologist, a brilliant scholar and a man of wide and unusual interests whose friendship has come to mean a great deal to me.

As time went by the scope of my work enlarged. I had a lot to do with the establishment of a Tribal Research Institute for Assam State. I was appointed Hon. Adviser for Tribal Affairs for both Manipur and Tripura, to which I pay occasional visits though not as many as I would

like. I have never been appointed to any official post in the Naga area but, in practice, I have paid a number of visits to it both before and after the foundation of Nagaland.

Then in 1959, the Home Minister, Pandit G.B. Pant, asked me to be chairman of a committee to study the progress of development in selected tribal areas throughout the country. Under the Second Five-Year Plan the normal Community Development Blocks had been supplemented by a scheme, sponsored and paid for by the Home Ministry, for what were then known as Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, the main point of which was that each Block was given twenty-seven lakhs of rupees instead of twelve. This came in for a good deal of criticism, for it was said that the money was not spent properly and sometimes not at all, and my committee was set up to investigate and report on what was really happening.

My colleagues were all men of wide experience in the tribal areas, and one of the very best of the younger men working in this field, O.K. Moorthy, who had for many years been concerned with tribal affairs in the Home Ministry, was Secretary.

We took about a year to complete our report and its preparation gave me opportunity to revisit some of my old haunts and discover others. For the first time I was able to go to the tribal districts of Andhra Pradesh, Chanda and Mokada-Talasari in Bombay, the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam, and later to Rajasthan.

When we had finished our inquiries I felt the only possible way of getting a report written was to do it in Delhi, and the Home Ministry accommodated me in a pleasant room in the main Secretariat where I spent a couple of months.

At last, after toning down my English suitably, all the members agreed to sign the report which ran to about 550 pages, most of them written, or at least rewritten, by me, and I presented it to the Home Minister, Pandit G.B. Pant, at the end of March 1960.

Our report dealt with all the varied aspects of development. We had chapters on staffing problems and training; on land, forests and agriculture with special attention to the vexed question of shifting cultivation; on animal husbandry, communications, health services, education, women's programmes, arts and crafts, housing, cooperation and research. We also supplied detailed and specific accounts of twenty of the Special Blocks in different parts of India.

I myself felt that the most important part of our report was an introductory chapter called 'The Fundamentals of an Approach to the Tribes' for, as I have said on many occasions, it is not so much what you do, still less the amount of money you spend, as the way you will do it that makes the real difference to the tribal people. One of the criticisms of these Special Development schemes had been that they lacked any 'tribal touch', for stereotyped plans had generally been taken over as they stood for the tribal areas and there was no serious attempt to adapt the budget to tribal needs or the policy to tribal life.

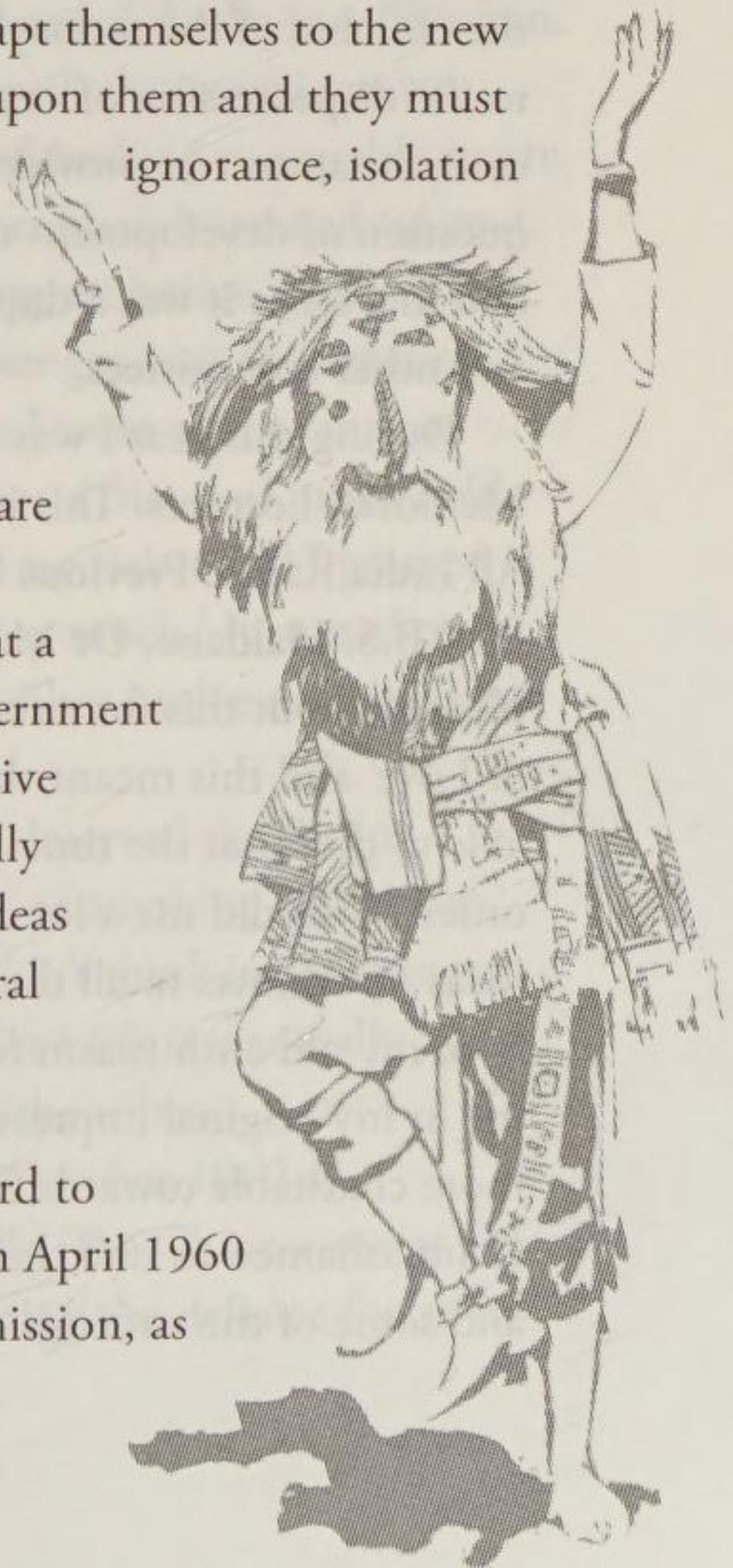
We concluded by suggesting a great expansion of properly adapted development schemes during the Third Five-Year Plan, and asked for what we called a 'trivial' thirty crores of rupees for new Tribal Blocks. This, we pointed out, when spread over difficult and widespread areas, was actually a very modest sum. We went on to say:

The fear has been expressed that this will involve too rapid a progress, too complicated a programme, the employment of inferior men. This need not be so. We agree that we should 'hasten slowly', advance with caution, give the tribes a breathing-space to adapt themselves to the new world. Whatever we do, that world will come upon them and they must be ready for it. Hunger, disease, exploitation, ignorance, isolation are evils whose cure cannot be delayed; they must be treated rapidly and efficiently.

Each man is his brother's keeper and we must all atone for our long neglect and our wrong attitude. Mankind is one and the tribes are a very precious part of mankind.

The report was well received and discussed at a number of conferences and meetings. The Government of India did not accept some of the administrative proposals but did, by and large, accept practically everything else. I think that our fundamental ideas of tribal development have now won very general acceptance.

The work on this committee took me away from NEFA a good deal and I was looking forward to returning to my main job when it ended, but in April 1960 a Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, as



provided in the Constitution of India, was appointed. Mr U.N. Dhebar was the Chairman and I was one of the members. There were nine others, most of them Members of Parliament, and the terms of reference were very wide indeed, much wider, of course, than those of my own committee.

Dhebar had been Congress President and a Chief Minister; he is a persuasive and attractive man, with a boundless capacity for work and a passionate belief in social and economic justice. I got on well with him and we agreed on most of the major policy matters that came before us. Dhebar kept the Commission down to earth and was essentially interested in obtaining justice for the tribal people who had been so long neglected and so grossly exploited. The Commission's report has made its chief contribution by its insistence on a fair deal for the tribal people politically, economically and in the field of administration. We discovered that the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, which set up special areas all over tribal India in which the Governors were expected to take a special interest, had been an almost complete failure. Land was still being alienated on a staggering scale. Millions of tribesmen were in the clutches of the moneylenders. The great industrial projects have led to the dispossession of vast tracts of tribal land and, although proper compensation was provided, this had often not been paid. On the question of development the Commission had nothing very new to say and in a sense it was a duplication of the work of our earlier committee and other committees.

During this year I was invited to give the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial Lectures. This is an annual event in Delhi, arranged by All India Radio. Previous lecturers were Mr C. Rajagopalachari, Dr J.B.S. Haldane, Dr M.S. Krishnan and Dr Zakir Hussain. I was very pleased about this for two reasons. I took as my subject 'The Philosophy of Love' and this meant that I had to re-read a great deal, which I was able to do for at the time I was confined to the house under doctor's orders. This did me a lot of good. It forced me to study again Gandhi's ideas on Ahimsa in all their beauty and profundity; it fired me afresh with my old enthusiasm for Plato and Augustine, though it confirmed me in my original impression that Aristotle was a dull dog. I felt much more charitable towards C.S. Lewis after reading his *Allegory of Love* for (I am ashamed to say) the first time. I discovered Father M.C. D'Arcy and some of the writings of Bengal Vaishnavism.

The other reason was that I have always had a very affectionate memory of Sardar Patel and he had a considerable influence on my life, since it was he who had originally insisted that I should go to tribal India.

When India became a Republic she abolished all civilian titles, to the agonized regret of those who had them and the disappointment of those who hoped to get them one day. But it was soon found that some sort of honours were necessary even in the public life of a democracy and accordingly four Orders, as they would be called in England, were established—the Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. These are awarded by the President to scientists, doctors, philosophers, musicians, men of letters, leading athletes, artists, social workers and a carefully restricted number of officials and administrators.

On 26 January 1961—Republic Day—I was in Along with the Tribal Commission. Someone had a transistor radio and I was listening to the news when I heard to my great pleasure that I had been awarded the Padma Bhushan.

Three months later, on 27 April, the investiture was held in New Delhi, and I arrived looking reasonably smart in white khadi trousers and short black buttoned-up coat.

After this I had so many congratulations from all over the place that I am afraid I rather got into the habit of expecting them. One day when I went to the cinema, the ticket-vendor, who was rather a friend of mine, held out his hand after I had bought my ticket and I grasped it firmly and said, 'Thank you so very much.' It turned out, however, that all he wanted was another twelve naye paise on the entrance-fee.

I actually have never thought I deserved the Padma Bhushan—I had never expected it or anything other than entirely academic awards: I just didn't think in those terms—but I was certainly very pleased, for I felt it was really in recognition of our NEFA policy for the tribes.

This policy faced its severest test when in October 1962 a long-gathering storm broke over the NEFA hills. The Chinese swept over the frontier in great strength, overwhelming the defence forces in

parts of Kameng, Siang and Lohit. First to fall was Tawang, the place of pilgrimage which Lila and I had visited six years previously. Then after a deceptive lull, the invaders bypassed the Se La, occupied Bomdi La and came south towards Tezpur. In Lohit, Wallong fell after heavy fighting and the Chinese threatened the valley below it. At about the same time they thrust their way into northern Siang, invaded the lovely Mechuka valley and occupied some of the little villages where I had once made my camps. The fact that I knew most of the places, except those in the far north of Subansiri, so well made this very real to me. My blood pressure went up twenty-five points after the fall of Tawang, came down during the lull and then went up again thirty points after the collapse of Bomdi La. This was not due to fear or anxiety, for I always had complete confidence about the final outcome of the struggle, but to real sorrow. I felt as if parts of me were being torn away: those days of crisis will never be forgotten by any of us who were closely associated with NEFA.

In Shillong there was some alarm and a number of people sent their families away. Friends put a good deal of pressure on Lila to go away too with the children, but I took the line that we all belonged to the tribal people and to Assam and since it was obviously impossible for the whole population to be evacuated we should remain where we were. Events proved me right, for the cease-fire came and the Chinese withdrew.

Then came the task of re-establishing administration in the areas that had been invaded and of restoring confidence in the people. Happily there were a number of brilliant Frontier Service men available for this exacting duty. Pran Luthra, Bob Khating, U. Chakma, Krishna Johorey, Bernard Dougal and others did a wonderful job, in which they were assisted in every way by the tribal leaders. In a remarkably short time the frontier, so grievously disturbed, had settled down to its normal life again.

Travels in the NEFA Highlands

Although nothing has ever compared for sheer academic excitement with my investigations into the Muria dormitory in Bastar and the religion of the Saoras, touring in NEFA has been something completely different to anything I had ever experienced before. Except in the Kuttia Kond and Abujhmar Hills the physical exertion demanded was comparatively easy elsewhere in India. Now in NEFA I had to face vast distances which had always to be done on foot, mountains of a height which I had hardly even seen before and, at least in the early days, tracks were very bad. Although, specially in Orissa, I often visited villages which were practically unexplored, untouched even by minor officials, now in NEFA I aimed always at the most isolated and difficult areas and I had, on a number of occasions, the thrill of being almost an explorer. As a local paper, discussing the possibilities of research, once pointed out: 'NEFA is a great field of virgins for the Elwins of this world.' Friendly as the central Indian people usually were, there was nothing to compare with the enthusiastic hospitality shown to the traveller in the remoter parts of NEFA. The difficulties were great but the splendour of the countryside and the charm of the people were altogether exhilarating.

A Pilgrimage to Tawang

Tawang is a long way off, and when I went there the journey had to be made on foot or pony: now a wonderful mountain road makes it accessible. Lila and I went there in May 1956.

From Tezpur, we drove through Charduar at the foot of the mountains, and then up the new road towards Bomdi La. It was not an easy journey, for to those unaccustomed to riding on the little mountain ponies, their habit of walking on the extreme edge of precipices (and there are many of them) is somewhat alarming; we were badly bitten by dimdam flies, horrid insects whose bites leave poisoned and itching sores; and before long our leg-muscles began to ache excruciatingly. But the path led us through such lovely scenery, valley and stream and hill,

with sacred shrines to bless us on our way, that we quickly forgot the discomforts. The dust and tumult of mechanized transport were left behind us; ahead was pilgrimage among the snow mountains and the holy places.

From Bomdi La, escorted by a very dear friend, R.S. Nag, who was then Political Officer, and a fine young anthropologist, Sachin Roy, we went along a river valley to Dirang, eighteen miles away, which is one of the prettiest places I have ever seen. Monpa houses are substantial two-story stone buildings, and here they are perched picturesquely on a number of small hills between which runs a lovely little stream of crystal-clear water. There are several Buddhist temples and other buildings which house prayer-wheels and grindstones worked by water. The great prayer-wheels, like the flags fluttering in the breeze, repeat endlessly (if inaudibly) the sacred words OM MANI PADME HUM.

In the middle of the village is an imposing old fort (*dzong*) and above it is a temple where we made our camp.

A mile or so outside Dirang we experienced the first of the welcomes with which the local people greet visitors. There were the Head Lama and his band of trumpeters (some of the trumpets were seven or eight feet long) and drummers, and with him was a large crowd of local officials, Chiefs and delightful school-children, all in their own attractive dress, very pretty and charming children too. At every village along the way the procedure was the same. We were met by the local dignitaries, generally with a band. Each garlanded us with a white scarf and we gave scarves in return. Then they led us in procession to a small tent, tastefully decorated with flowers, in which a number of seats covered with brightly-coloured carpets or saddle-cloths awaited us. There were low tables and on them silver, china or wooden cups. Sometimes there was a bowl of walnuts or wild strawberries. Then the wife of the leading inhabitant filled the cups with butter-tea—an alarming concoction of tea, salt and butter—and raised them one by one first to my lips and to my wife's and then to the

A Monpa girl of Dirang-Dzong carrying a water pot with its cane cover

rest of the company in strict order of precedence. I myself usually only touched the cup with my lips, for I found the smell of the often rancid butter overwhelming, but everybody else enjoyed it and some drank as many as eight cups in succession. After the tea, we were often offered rice-spirit, one of the strongest drinks you can get, rather like vodka.

This was sometimes a real embarrassment, especially when offered early in the morning and then repeated in village after village throughout the day. But we learnt that if we dipped one finger in the bowl and sprinkled a little of the spirit three times in honour of the Lord Buddha, it was not necessary to drink it.

These Monpa people are singularly courteous, gentle and friendly. They take off their hats and, holding them between their hands, make a little bow at every word you speak. They still, in some places, put out their tongues by way of greeting. In my whole tour I never heard a child crying and I do not remember hearing a single angry word.

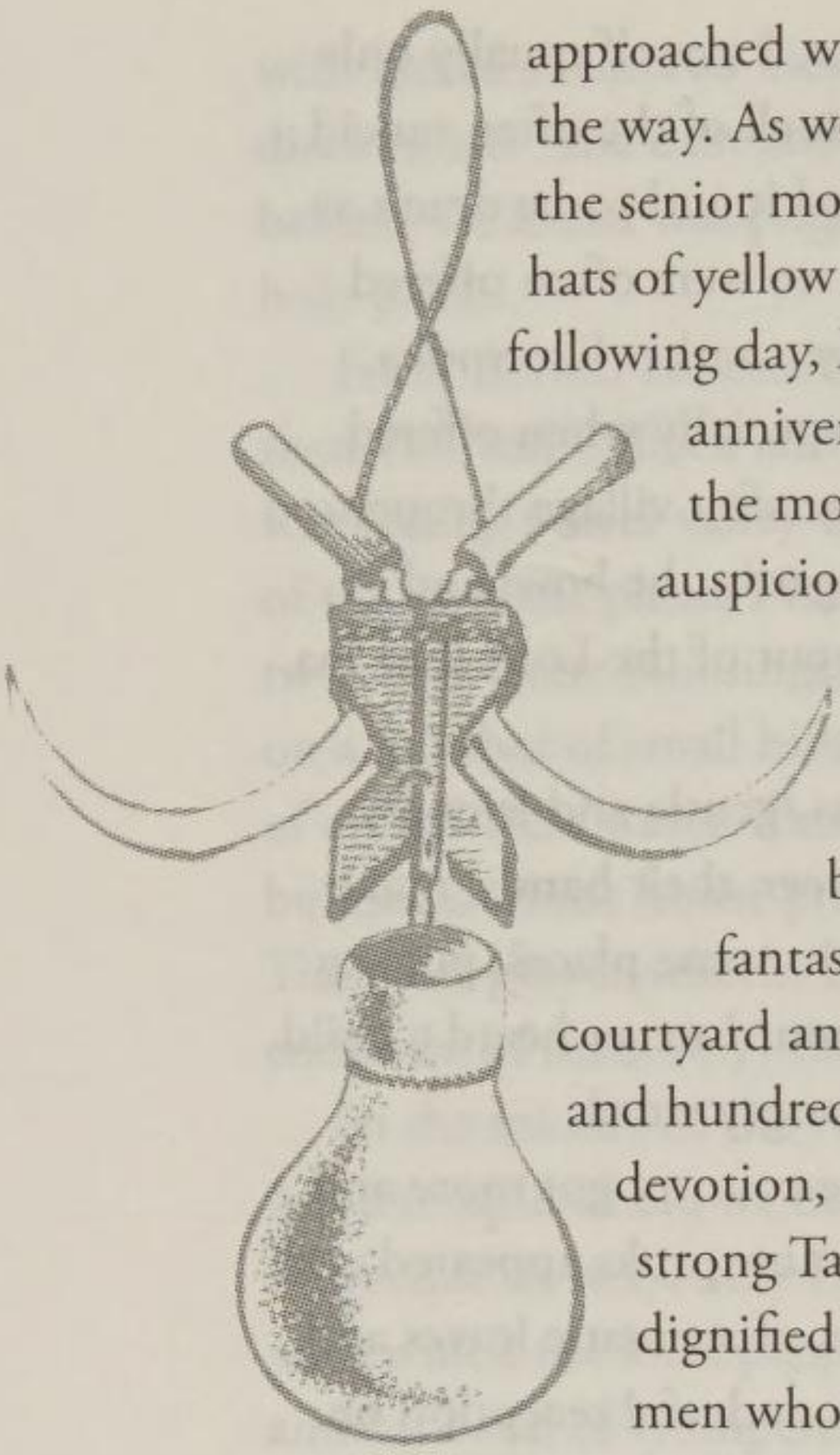
As we continued our march from Dirang the country got more and more beautiful, the mountains became higher, snow peaks appeared, and now as we approached any village people lit fires of aromatic leaves and branches to greet us. At Senzedzong, we had a wonderful reception on a broad plateau under the towering Se La mountains. It was a perfect day and the colour, the beauty of the scenery, the picturesque delightful people, the trumpets, the dignified ceremonial were unforgettable.

Now we had to cross the Se La Pass, over 14,000 feet high. We had been warned that the way was steep, that we should not be able to breathe, that it was sure to rain. And alas, rain it did, both on our way up and our way back but, though we could not see the distant views, it was a memorable climb. At the top, where we had a picnic lunch, there are twin lakes or tarns which are called the 'Eyes of God'.

When we reached our little camp by a stream, half-way down the other side, we found our tent had been made by the Monpas into a sort of bower of flowers, most beautifully done.

But flowers do not keep out the cold. It was the smallest tent I have ever been in; it was pouring with rain, and at about 12,000 feet we had the coldest night I had known for a long while. But at sunset Lila and I had a wonderful time picking wild strawberries.

Then we went on for another twenty miles to Tawang. From a distance of fifteen miles we got the first view of the great monastery riding like a ship on its hillside, 10,000 feet above sea level, and as we



approached we had a dozen receptions in little villages along the way. As we drew nearer Tawang, the Prior and some of the senior monks in their splendid robes and impressive hats of yellow cloth came three miles out to meet us. The following day, May the 24th, Buddha Purnima, 2500th anniversary of the birth of the Buddha, we visited the monastery: there could not have been a more auspicious moment.

We were met at the entrance of the monastery by the Prior and other monks; scarves were exchanged; trumpets were blown, and we walked slowly through a fantastic medley of buildings into the great courtyard and the main temple, which with its great statue and hundreds of smaller images is the centre of an ardent devotion, of the Mahayana type of Buddhism with strong Tantric elements. Fantastic images of demons, dignified images of great saints and Rinpoches (holy men who have been reincarnated in another birth), scrolls, flags, temple-hangings, bells and lights, human thigh-bones used as trumpets, rich carpets, give the temple, which tradition decrees should always be illuminated by artificial light, a rich and sombre magnificence.

As it was Buddha Purnima day, most of the monks were sitting in long rows in the temple chanting prayers. We went round offering scarves to the principal images. The temple on this day was lit by a thousand lamps and decorated with some remarkable pictures made on the ground with coloured butter. There were also a thousand little Buddhas made of butter round the walls.

Later we went to the very fine library whose great treasure is the Getompa, eight large volumes, three of which are lettered in gold. There are also copies of the other main Buddhist scriptures, some printed and some handwritten, over seven hundred books in all. This may not sound very much, but a monastic book is a real book, about the size of half a dozen ordinary books of this careless modern world. The Lamas have a great reverence for knowledge, even though many of them are not themselves learned. Every temple has its sacred books which are carried in procession round the village on festal days. Books are worshipped, even if they are not

read. In the library we were entertained to some strange-tasting but pleasant dishes and, of course, the butter-tea, and from the balcony we watched the dances performed in honour of the festival. The most moving of these was the Thutotdam, the dance of the king and queen of death, which reminds the spectators that death awaits every man and that they must not, therefore, be too much attached to worldly existence.

A Scramble among the Tagins

Shortly before I came to Shillong the Tagins of the far north had attacked a detachment of Assam Rifles and their porters at a place called Achingmori and killed many of them. Military operations had to be mounted against the turbulent tribesmen, but they were soon over, and the people settled down fairly quickly. In March 1955 I decided to visit the Tagins, although their country was then difficult and wild.

We had to fly from Jorhat to a remote place far away in the hills.

From there I went first into the lonely and almost unvisited Sipi valley. The track north at the time was so bad that we sometimes had to go on our hands and knees and, unlike other parts of NEFA, there were no dormitories and the houses were so small and crowded that, although I did sometimes stay in them, I found that my presence was rather an embarrassment. I had no tent and only two tarpaulins. We used to make a little hut, sometimes having to cut away part of the hillside to get a flat piece of ground, and with one tarpaulin on the floor and the other above me I used to crouch like a frog in the pouring rain which even in March fell upon us relentlessly.

Our first march of twelve miles, which took us over eight hours, up to a little camp by the Sipi river, was an appropriate introduction to what we were in for. We pushed our way up and down, down and up, along a narrow slippery track, part of it on a slant so that you

Tagin priest of northern Subansiri

could not put your feet comfortably on the ground, along the right bank of the Subansiri. There seemed no end to it, the slither down, the clamber up. Twice I fell through the track up to my waist. Hundreds of leeches reared their lithe bodies on the ground baring their anti-coagulant jaws, great spiders the size of your hand hung from above, dimdams buzzed like jet fighters round our heads. On this first day I picked forty-eight leeches off my person, finding them inside my socks, deep in my boots, on my arms and even in my hair.

The Sipi river flows through a narrow valley, flanked by steep, heavily-wooded hills, and the Tagin villages are mostly in hollows well below the summits, and those I visited were well watered. They were small, with not more than six to eight houses, though each house had at least four hearths and accommodated a fairly large number of people. The granaries were built a short distance away as a protection against fire.

There was at first some apprehension that I had come to make further inquiries about the Achingmori tragedy. At a remote village at the very end of the valley, the leaders did not come to see me for a considerable time, though I was immediately surrounded by a large crowd of ordinary people. But presently the Chief, dressed in fine handwoven robes and attended by a small bodyguard, marched up in grim silence. The crowd scattered and we were left face to face. It was an electric moment: for the first time the Chief's eyes rested on, shall we say, a regular subscriber to the *New Statesman.* Here, he said to himself, is civilization. He obviously did not care greatly for what he saw. I could feel him drinking me in—the undistinguished features, the spectacles, the worn-out coat, frayed and baggy trousers, the muddy boots. Is that all, he seemed to say, that they have to offer? He stood upright, motionless, and glowered at me, while he fingered, rather suggestively I thought, his formidable sword. I tried a smile—there was no response. I offered the customary gifts—he waved them aside. I tried the few words I knew—and with a gesture of dignity and scorn he handed me a present, a solitary egg: white and chilling nestled in my palm. I smiled again but even I felt that my smiles had become a thought mechanical. There was obviously nothing for it: I would have to put on my little act, which in my opinion is worth a whole platoon of Assam Rifles as a safety measure. I removed my dentures. There was a roar of interest and excitement from the crowd. I put them back. Another roar. After I had conducted this humiliating

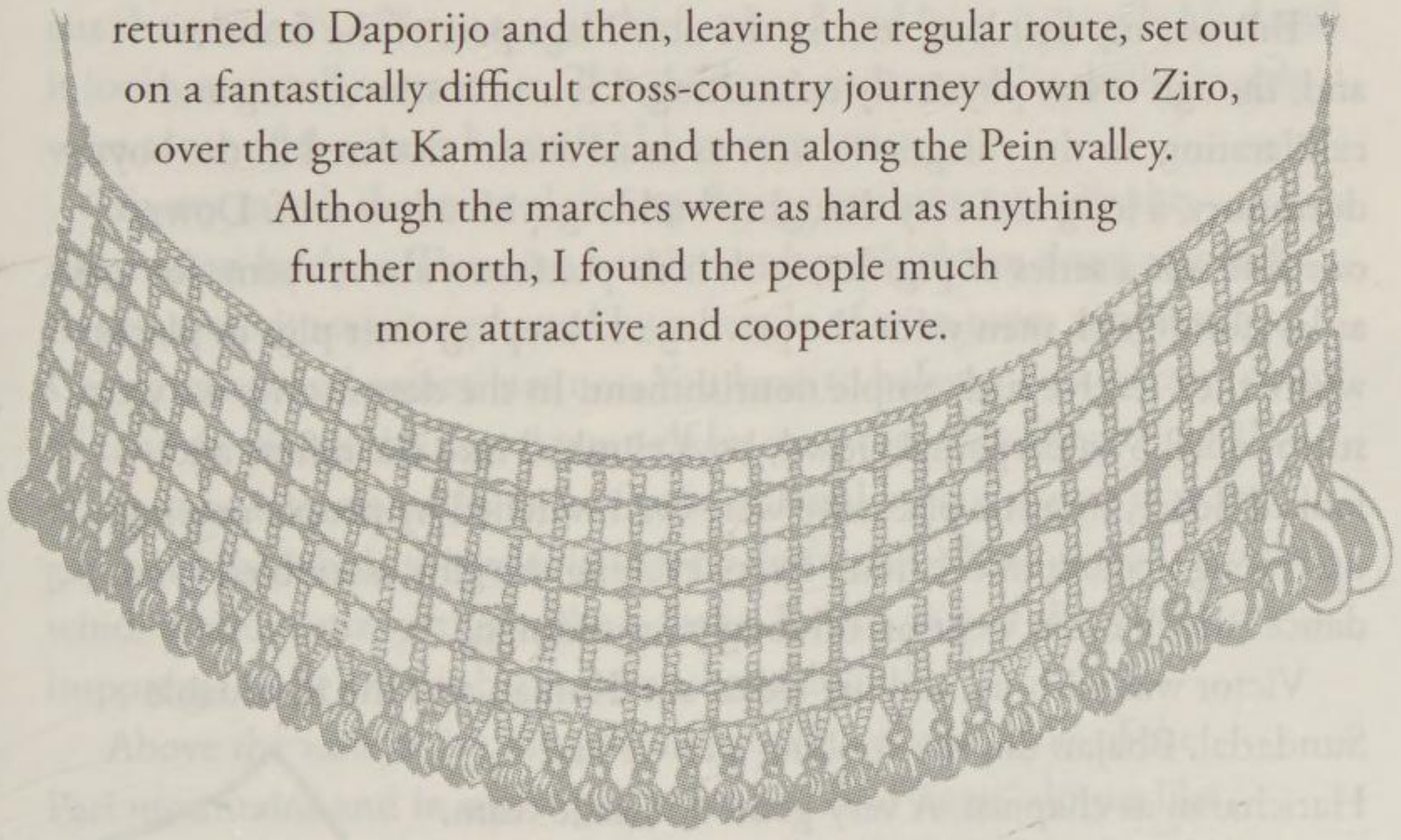
performance several times, there was at last a reaction. The Chief's lips began to twitch, and he finally broke into a hearty laugh. Pointing to his greying hair, he declared, 'I am an old man too,' and soon he was sitting beside me very affably.

But even now not altogether at ease. The Tagins, he knew, had misbehaved and he had clearly made up his mind not to talk. So to every question, he had but one reply: 'I know nothing, I didn't do it.'

But I think that by the time I left he was happy and content, and he was certainly almost vociferous in his demands for a fuller development of the area.

One of the most distressing features in the life of these people was a form of dermatitis, which begins as a patch of ringworm and develops into a generalized scaly desquamation of the skin of the entire body. The skin turns a white or silvery colour and flakes off: I saw men scraping themselves with knives to remove the scales; they were always restless with the constant itch and irritation. This disfiguring and distressing affliction has now been diagnosed as *tinea imbricata,* and the NEFA doctors are making it their special care to treat it.

After my visit to the Tagins and the northern Gallongs I returned to Daporijo and then, leaving the regular route, set out on a fantastically difficult cross-country journey down to Ziro, over the great Kamla river and then along the Pein valley. Although the marches were as hard as anything further north, I found the people much more attractive and cooperative.



They were what have long been called Hill Miris, Saraks or Panibotias. They were free of the disturbing skin disease that afflicted the Tagins; many of them were very good-looking. Some of the women were still wearing their traditional cane-brassières and all had elaborate cane-belts, very carefully woven. They did their hair in rather the same

way as the Daflas, with a knot in front and very attractive little cane-hats, sometimes decorated with porcupine quills.

My interpreters had their wives with them and we went along stimulated by the constant crackle of matrimonial discord. They were all polygamous. One of them had three wives with him in the camp—he had four altogether, three, he said, to work in the house and one for sex. He hoped for eight and explained that he actually wanted twelve but, owing to the new-fangled ideas of Government, he supposed he would have to be content with less.

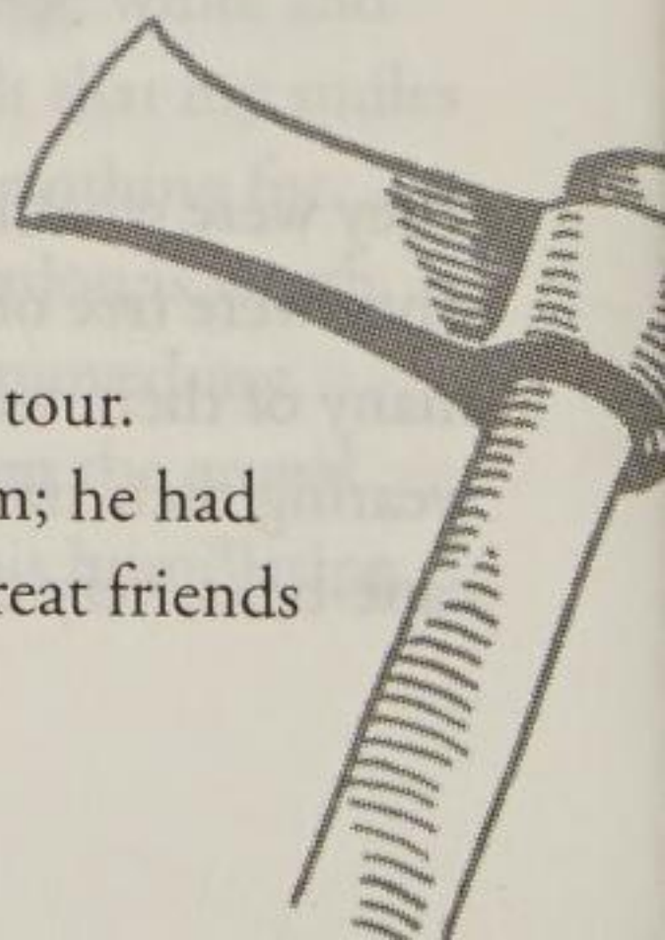
This was perhaps the most exacting tour I have ever done. I can't say that I had enjoyed it, but I shall always be glad that I did it.

Promenades in Siang

There is nothing to compare with Siang, and the four long tours I have made in this delectable Division stand out beyond comparison with any others. On the first of them, in January 1955, I went from Along down to Pangin and then up the left bank of the Siang river to Shimong, crossed by bamboo bridge to Karko and then back to Along along the right bank.

This was my first long tour in the non-Naga part of the frontier and, though it was physically exhausting, I found it stimulating and exhilarating. In the villages we were as usual accommodated in the boys' dormitory, a long and very draughty building with a low roof. Down one side was a series of pigsties, with little platforms above them, for use as lavatories: rich men value the privilege of keeping their pigs in places where they receive such ample nourishment. In the dormitories we were surrounded by a perpetual crowd; boys climbed into the rafters and looked down, in some places we were even watched by people peering up through cracks in the floor. Every evening the girls assembled for a dance, which often went on till long past midnight.

Victor was with us, and my eldest son Kumar, and the invaluable Sundarlal. Bhajan did the cooking and we had Haricharan as chaprasi. A very good domestic team. For interpreter I had two of the Political interpreters in their red coats, Tapang Taki and Orin Modi, two charming people who added much to the success of the tour.



Kumar, then about fourteen, was in tremendous form; he had his Abor dao (a sort of hatchet) and a spear and made great friends

with Tapang and Orin, as well as with many of the villagers. He looked after the first-aid, tying up many wounds and distributing simple medicines. He played the gramophone to frequent and admiring crowds. And all the time he was in the highest spirits. He was able to watch an interesting airdrop and was very excited at seeing the parachutes billowing down, and thoroughly enjoyed balancing himself across Abor bridges. He fell a dozen times on every march, but was light enough to do himself no damage. Victor, however, had a number of nasty falls, but on the marches I got through unscathed. One night, however, I went down into a deep ditch among rocks and sprained my ankle. Fortunately we only had forty miles more to walk.

My next visit, now six years ago, was to the very isolated Bori area.

After flying part of the way, with two dozen goats as fellow-passengers, I set out on foot with my little party into the Bori villages, a very interesting and picturesque part of the world, about which nothing has so far been written. The Boris are Abors in the sense that they speak the same language, but in dress and appearance they are distinctive. They are enthusiastic weavers and they make an attractive skirt, coat and cloak of wool which is brought down from the north. Both men and women cut their hair in a fringe across the forehead and keep it long behind and it looks unusually attractive. The children, and especially the little girls, were some of the most beautiful I have ever seen.

To my mind, the most alarming things on this tour were the suspension-bridges. These are bamboo tubes which are slung across the rivers, sometimes strengthened by a couple of wire-ropes supplied by Government and sometimes not. You have to balance on a narrow strip of cane or wire and support yourself by cane-ropes on either side. The entire tube is enclosed by bits of cane or bamboo but there are many gaps and the whole thing looks extremely fragile. When there is a strong wind, a bridge may wriggle like a snake. In this part of the world it is as important to be an acrobat as an anthropologist!

Above the valleys rise the splendid snow-covered peaks of the Pari mountains and in many places we had fine views, almost like Switzerland. Unhappily, after a few days the weather turned against us and the beauty of the country was lost in constant cloud and mist. It also began to rain.

In the Bori country we made our camp as elsewhere in the boys' dormitories, which here are called bangos. The bango is a long draughty

building with a floor that feels as if it may collapse any moment, and has a series of hearths down its length. It is used by the villagers as council-house, dormitory and club and all day long there are people sitting round the fire and talking at the top of their voices: the Boris, when excited, speak in a high-pitched monotone and generally three or four of them hold forth at the same time. When they do the din is terrific. 'A Bori's tongue', they say, 'is four yards long.' All the unmarried boys and men sleep round the fire. I generally had my bed in one corner.

Here were people who were still in the childhood of the race. Many of them had never struck a match; they had not seen a watch and did not know what it was. They had the most intense curiosity about everything we had, examined with great care the construction of a chair or table and were fascinated by our cooking arrangements. The one thing in which they had lost interest was the aeroplane, the 'Government cart', so often passing overhead that they no longer bothered to look up.

There was still slavery in this area, though the Administration was gradually liberating the slaves and has now succeeded in liberating nearly all of them. The slaves were often well treated, and I got to know a number of them and wrote down their stories.

At the beginning of 1958 I went, with Kumar and my usual small party, to Tuting in the extreme north of Siang for a wonderful seven weeks' tour. We went first down the right bank of the Siang river, visiting the villages of the Ashings as far as lovely Bomdo where we crossed the river on an improvised bamboo raft, and then worked north again through the Shimong area to the east, and finally up the sacred, fertile and beautiful Yang Sang Chu valley as far as Mankhota. On our return to Tuting we were held up by bad weather for ten days and used part of the time to visit Gelling and the Kepang La which forms the boundary between India and Tibet.

A girl weaving at Bomdo on the right bank of the upper Siang river

This is one of the most fascinating and exciting parts of NEFA; the

scenery, when it is not hidden by cloud and rain, is superb; the people are charming, hospitable and photogenic: tribal institutions still retain their vitality. It is a country of song and dance, of hard enthusiastic work, of fine spinning and weaving, and of laughing, pretty children.

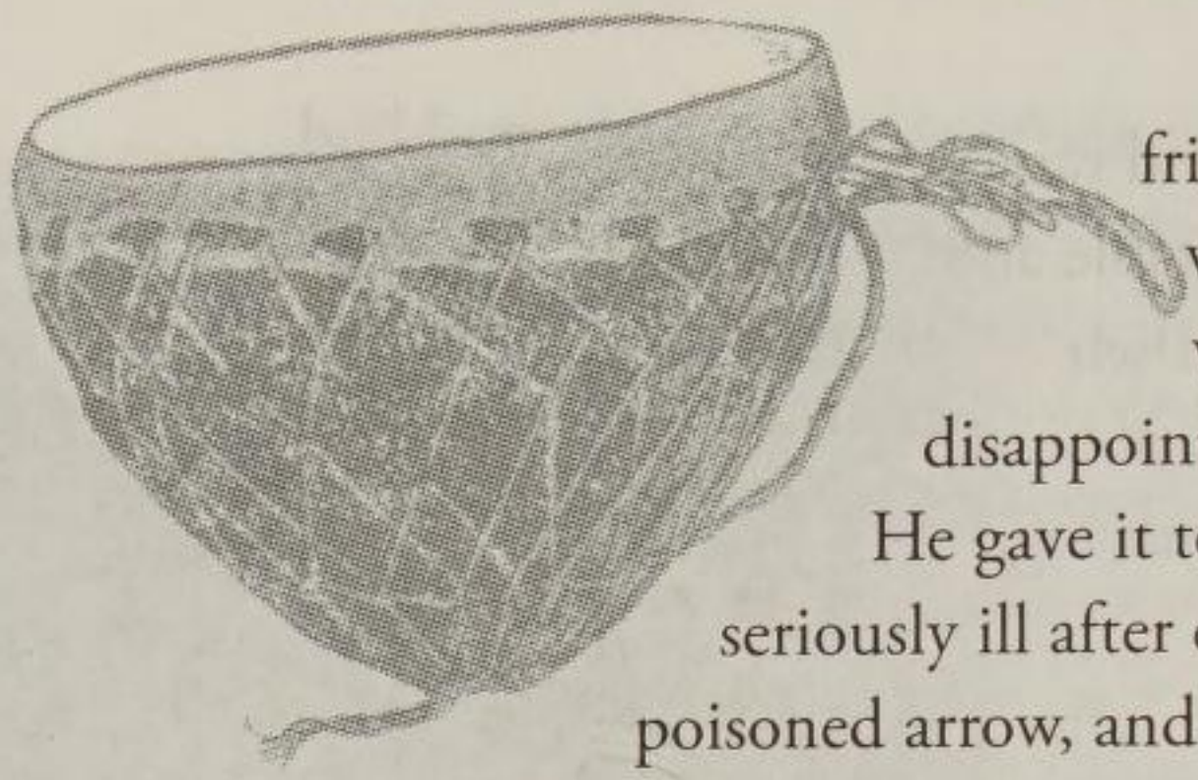
A Pailibo in the extreme north of Siang

We crossed the Siang river on bamboo rafts, a greater adventure than it sounds, for the Abors are afraid of the rivers that are one of the most notable features of their territory, for they are believed to be haunted by dangerous spirits, the Nippongs, who drag men down into the water, and a number of drowning tragedies in the past had discouraged them from either fishing or crossing the river by boat or raft. It was, therefore, by no means easy to persuade the Ashings to help us make the raft at Bomdo and only one or two of them would venture on it, although scores of people gathered at the bank to watch the hazardous crossing. At Tuting, however, a very fine raft was constructed by a Memba who had learnt to use a primitive kind of oar. It could accommodate eleven persons and there was a comfortable seat with a prayer-flag at the prow. On the bank the Abors busied themselves in offering sacrifices for our safe crossing and the Membas and Khambas erected a sapling decorated with prayer-flags.

In October of the same year I made another long tour, of six weeks, in north-west Siang, going first to Mechuka and then working down through the Ramo, Pailibo and Bori areas back to Along.

The valley here is of great beauty. I had visited Mechuka before for a few hours but a visit only to the outpost gives no idea of the scenery and the possibilities of this lovely valley surrounded by pine-covered hills which give way to the snow-covered high ranges beyond.

We went on to the Ramo-Pailibo area, a strange and unique part of the world. The mountains are formidable and the tracks in the main are very difficult. The Niying Shi river between Mechuka and Tato is so hemmed in by steep and towering hills that the traveller feels as if he is passing through a deep gorge and after a time has a sense of claustrophobia. This is a country where formerly there were human sacrifices, where slaves were captured and sold, hostages kept in the stocks, and suspicion and hostility ruled the day: but it is a very



friendly part of the world now. In one village, a kindly Pailibo presented me with a piece of monkey meat, but to my disappointment my cook rejected it indignantly. He gave it to one of my interpreters who fell seriously ill after eating it, for it had been killed with a poisoned arrow, and was insufficiently cooked to counteract the aconite.

The Strange Fascination of Lohit

The people of Lohit have always fascinated me and I do not know why I have not spent more time among them, even though I did make two long tours among the Mishmis. I never, however, made my way on foot up the Lohit valley to Walong although, as I shall describe, I went up by plane. I also visited the Khamptis several times and particularly my 1959 visit to their villages (when Wasant came with me) was most rewarding. It was there that I saw village Buddhism at its simplest and best. I took a number of bronze Buddhas to present to the little temples and everywhere was welcomed with most touching enthusiasm. I was given the honorable title of Phradayaka by the monks of Ningro.

My very first visit to the Division was with Rashid Yusuf Ali, one of the most remarkable (though as yet unrecognized) men that I have ever met. We went at the height of the rains, plunging on elephants through trackless jungle in search of a ruined copper temple. This slightly lunatic, fruitless yet altogether worthwhile adventure was typical of Rashid—I would like to think it was typical of me also, but I am not sure: on my own I am afraid I should have waited for the rain to stop.

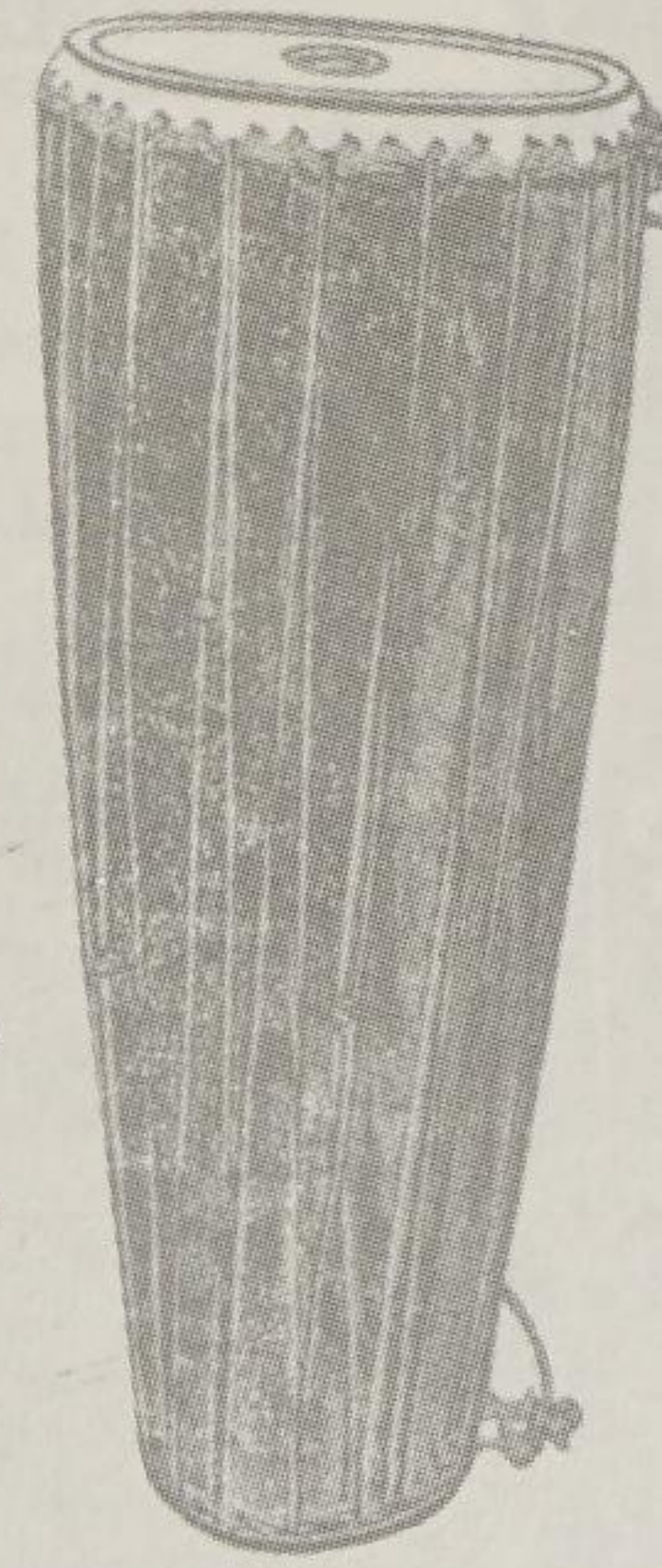
My first Mishmi tour was across country from Tezu to Roing, nothing very adventurous, but at that time, in November 1955, it was possible in three weeks to see real Mishmi life there without marching hundreds of miles and climbing impossible mountains, though the country was very rough.

There is always a special thrill in one's first visit to a new tribe, and in this case I was a little apprehensive, for all previous travellers had stressed how 'difficult' the Mishmis were and how unpleasant and unattractive. I can only say I fell in love with them at once. Our first village was inhabited by Taraon (or Digaru) Mishmis and the men wore their hair tied in a knot on the top of the head and the women

had theirs in a fantastic piled-up style which would attract admiring attention anywhere.

I stayed throughout the tour in Mishmi houses, some of which are very large, containing a number of related families. You must imagine a long low building raised on poles above the ground, with an entrance and veranda at each end. A corridor runs down one side and off this open a number of small rooms, each for a separate family or, where the owner of the house has several wives, each for a different wife and her children. Visitors enter by the eastern door, and it is correct for you to go and sit by the fire in complete silence for a few minutes before doing anything. Then you are given the first room as you enter, for this is maintained as a guest-room: it even has its own lavatory above the pigsty. The rooms were always clean and tidy and for the first time since I came to NEFA I managed to avoid the bites of fleas, though there was an alarming number of hornets. The only disadvantage for a tall person like myself was that the roof was so low that I had to stoop the whole time I was indoors. My guest-room was always crowded with people, young and old of both sexes, and I had as much privacy as a rare fish has in an aquarium. But the Mishmis have no idea of privacy; at night husbands and wives lay in couples all round us and no one seemed to be embarrassed.

Some Mishmis are so lazy that they do not bother to clear the ground even round their houses and the jungle comes right lip to the door. In front of the house is often an elaborate tomb, with a spire and flags flying, and on the walls inside are racks of the skulls of animals. Every animal ever taken in the chase or offered at a ceremonial feast is represented here. The Mishmis never did head-hunting in the ordinary way: what they went in for was hair-hunting and thumb-hunting. When they killed an enemy, they cut off the thumb of the right hand, 'the hand with which you eat your food', and a tuft of hair, and brought these trophies home in triumph. After a special celebration, the hair was hung above the door and the thumb buried before it.



The first ten days of the tour was among these Taraon Mishmis, who are the most picturesque and handsome. Their weaving is good and I was able to collect a number

of beautiful textiles. They are devoted to tobacco and both men and women always had very long brass or silver pipes in their mouths. They are almost the only people in NEFA who do not tattoo and do not chew betel, and most of them had lovely white teeth.

The second ten days was spent among the Idu Mishmis, a tougher and more warlike group, separated from the Taraons by the Paya river. At our first village we were a little disconcerted; the people did not seem friendly; our interpreter was lying dead drunk out in the jungle; the local Chief did not come near us. But things warmed up later, and I was soon liking the Idus almost as much as the Taraons. They are rather like Baigas, very wild and shaggy, real jungle folk, with their poisoned arrows and a cross-bow which they fire by a trigger like a gun. The weaving of the Idus is also good and one day a party of them came to our camp from a village many days distant towards the frontier selling cloth of excellent quality and pattern. Some of them wear bright-coloured woollen coats adorned with crosses, a circumstance which in the last century had made Father Krick believe that they had been converted to Christianity long ago and had then reverted.

This is the country of wild elephants, who sometimes kill people and often spoil the crops. I saw a man in the Tezu hospital who had been tossed by one of them two years before and had not yet fully recovered.

Kaman Mishmis in a forest clearing

Anyone killed by a wild elephant, however, goes to the Land of the Sun, not the ordinary subterranean Land of the Dead, and has every comfort there. It is, therefore, a not undesirable death.

One year Lila went with me on a long and very arduous tour of the Khamlang valley. We were seen off at Tezu by the Political Officer, Uma Sharma, one of the best of men, courteous, gentle and courageous, and we first passed through a few Khampti villages and then went into the lonely valley running up into the mountains.

The Khamlang valley is a thinly populated and little-explored area of great beauty running eastward from Wakro up to the snow-line. It is sparsely inhabited by the Miju or Kaman Mishmis; there are fewer than fifty houses in the entire valley and I estimated the population at about five hundred. I was able to visit every village except two, most of the settlements consisting of only one to four houses. The tracks were as bad as anything I have met in NEFA, and most of the villages are placed high on the hills and there are long and steep climbs up to them. The countryside is further divided by many streams which in the rains become impassable for days at a time.

The Kaman Mishmis are an attractive people, quiet and friendly, and in this area, where they have largely retained their own beautiful dress and ornaments, they look delightful. Their weaving is among the finest in NEFA and is of extraordinary variety; we hardly ever saw two articles with exactly the same pattern. Their legends attribute the origin of these designs to butterflies, fish and snakes, whose markings they have copied, and there are other designs representing houses, human figures and even aeroplanes.

Our first halt was at Choukham and we then continued our journey on elephants up to the lonely outpost of Wakro at the entrance of the Khamlang valley. This first part of the journey was rather dreary, but we saw one or two Buddhist temples on the way, tumbledown buildings housing carvings of surprising beauty.

Looking up the valley we received an impression of incomparably wild scenery shrouded in mist and cloud. We had Tapan Kumar Barua, who has gone with me on a number of tours, to escort us and an excellent Mishmi interpreter, Somiya, and as we had been warned that the villages were very small, we for once took a tent. We sent the elephants home and proceeded on foot.

Our first village was rather discouraging, for we found it under a taboo and were not allowed to go in or see anybody. We camped outside in the jungle and were kept awake by the screams of wild elephants during the night. The next village, however, was high up among the hills, with a superb view of snow-clad mountains rising into a blue sky. The camp was ideally placed on the side of a hill and had views on three sides, and here the people, dressed in a fantastic variety of textiles, nearly all beautiful, were most friendly.

Here, Lila began to indulge her lifelong passion for washing people. There was a small waterfall and a pool nearby, and Lila collected the children (who were quite exceptionally dirty) and began a tremendous soaping and scrubbing. Presently some older girls and boys came to be washed too. Later, one of the boys said that it was an interesting experience, but not one that he would like to have repeated.

We travelled almost to the end of the valley, at least as far as we saw any people living, and then crossed the river, Lila washing people along the way and catching fish in the streams—she got some very fine three-inchers. Everywhere we went we found goitre and the Mishmis here were much poorer than those I had seen before.

At a village called Glao we found a fine lake among the hills. By now I was feeling rather heroic, for there was no evidence that anybody had been before us. But at Glao we discovered that Kingdon-Ward had long ago camped there for a whole week. In fact, in spite of exploring some very wild places, I have never been able to feel really heroic in NEFA. I have always been put down by either Kingdon-Ward or Peter James, a very popular Political Officer, now in tea, of the old days. No matter where I went, or how many miles I heaved myself over the mountains in northern Siang, everywhere I found that James Migam, as the Abors called him, had been before me, and not only had been before me but had been very much better. 'James Migam', they would say severely, 'gave us a mithun. James Migam danced all night. James Migam drank all the rice-beer we gave him.' I had to say that I was afraid I was not James Migam and just couldn't keep up with him.

The lake at Glao was full of fish but none of the Mishmis were willing to try to catch them. For eleven years before two boys and two girls had gone out on a raft and had never returned. It was said that they had been dragged below the water by the goddess of the lake.

On this tour I was, in addition to my general study of the needs of the people, specially interested in collecting textiles and discovering the meaning of their patterns. This was not very easy, for the Kaman Mishmis are not very free in their information. Everyone, however, told me that if I would persevere, I should find a very great authority, an old Mishmi, who knew everything. When we did finally discover him, I was thrilled, collected my assistants and rushed to greet him with my little note-book. Unfortunately he turned out to be deaf and dumb.

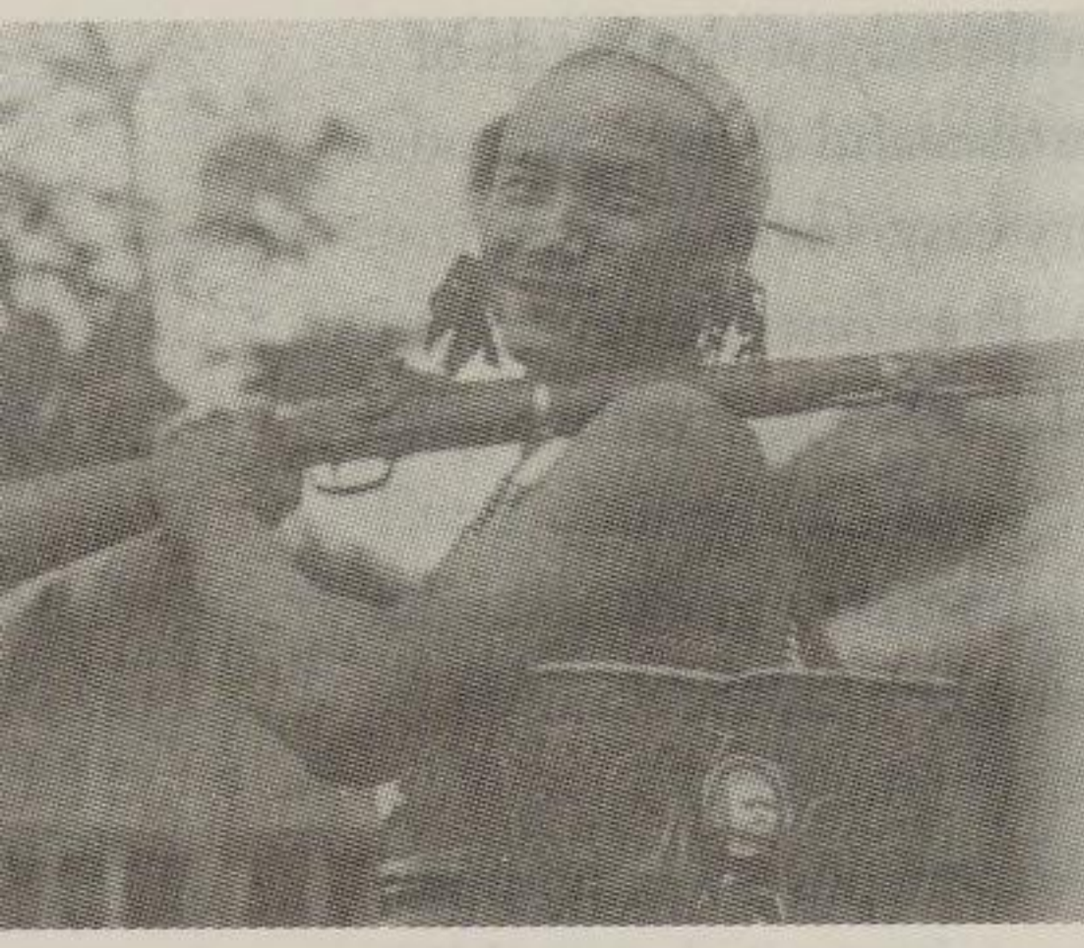
The only time, I am ashamed to say, that I went up the Lohit was by plane. Khemlal Rathee went with me and it was most exciting.

Visits to Tirap

I have made many visits to Tirap, the most south-easterly of the NEFA Divisions, but two of ray tours remain specially in my memory, for they were of four or five weeks each and took me into what was at that time little-explored territory. I first went to the Wancho area in November 1954, and was received everywhere with great friendliness and hospitality, though some of these villages had not been visited for a long time. At Pomau, a song was sung about my coming:

The sahib who lives in Shillong
Has flown like a maina bird to these high hills
And has perched on a tree in our village.
Our minds are full of happiness.
As the fish swim up the little streams from the great river,
The sahib has come from the plains to our high hills,
And our minds are full of happiness.

Although very few visitors, at that date, had gone into the Wancho hills, the nearer Wanchos themselves had for a hundred years been visiting the plains and this had led to a greater degree of acculturation than, for example, in the neighbouring Tuensang, now part of Nagaland. Dress had changed to some extent, though not as much as might have been expected: many of the men wore black coats, and some women had abandoned the characteristic and very pretty hand-woven skirt and were putting on a slightly broader piece of dirty mill-cloth. But many others in the interior retained their traditional, very becoming, dress and ornaments; most of the young boys and girls lived naked, except for their beads, their headdress and their flowers. The chief effect of contact



Acculturation! A former head-hunter of Tirap decorates his basket with a plastic doll instead of the traditional carved wooden head

with the outside world had been to make the people self-conscious, and when we entered a village all the women, and some even of the men, hastily draped themselves from head to foot in bedsheets. At Longphong, the women covered their heads and most of their faces, leaving only their eyes peeping out: one might have been in Arabia. This habit is not only most unaesthetic, but the moral effect of self-consciousness cannot be good.

There were many quaint and incongruous things—such as a trilby hat perched above a splendid array of beads. The Wancho men always wear something at the back of the head, round which the hair is wound. This, traditionally, is a piece of wood, which may be carved with human heads or other designs, or in the shape of a hand, if one is a warrior, or be made in various geometric patterns, and gaily coloured, if one is not. The custom survives, but you may see an old electric torch, a tablespoon, a pencil now used instead. Cartridges are commonly used in the ears, and plugs faced with mirrors: it is amusing to see a boy remove his ear-mirror, do his hair in it, and then replace it. Wancho warriors, who took heads long ago, still wear brass or wooden heads round their necks. On two occasions I saw, on either side of a large brass head, a pair of pink plastic heads, wrenched off dolls purchased in the bazaar: the effect was grimly horrible.

In a house in Lankao, I saw a long string of train-tickets hung up in memory of daring journeys to distant bazaars. In the house of the Chief of Senua, there were decorations of strings of monkey's paws, the beaks of the Great Indian Hornbill and old batteries from an electric torch.

The Wanchos are passionately attached to tea.

On the other hand, although they brew rice-beer, they were remarkably moderate in their use of it. I did not see a single drunken man, not a single person who was even slightly high, in the course of a month.

But many people were smoking opium. I saw dozens of little poppy plantations, and in some places every house was festooned with bundles of ganja hanging up to dry. The older people were making some

attempt to stop the younger generation from opium, but they were not prepared to set an example. The Administration has since made a lot of propaganda to reduce the opium habit.

The memory of my first tour in the Wancho hills of Tirap is of hard climbs over clean open country with great bare hills swept by the wind. Most of the Wancho villages are sited at something like three thousand feet on the tops of hills and for every march we had to climb down to the valley below, walk anything from five to ten miles along the lower ground and then climb up, when we were really tired, another three thousand feet to the next village. But there was magnificence and splendour about this country; you could stand on the top of a hill and see your whole programme mapped out around you, with the grey roofs of the villages you were to visit clustered on the top of the surrounding hills.

Some of the villages were a little dull, but there were two which I shall always remember. The first was Senua, where I had the good fortune of being able to watch the ceremony when the Wanchos send a girl to her husband's village. A party of boys and girls had come to fetch her and they all were decorated in their elaborate finery. They had head-bands of orange beads, brightly coloured cloth, and their hair was full of waving feathers and flowers. The bride was a very pretty little creature, with a fine bead-crown, and obviously happy. She was fortunate enough, they explained, to have slept with her future husband already and so it was not as if she were going to a stranger. I watched her put on her ornaments, while her friends made little parcels of presents. Finally, there was a great procession headed by two old women and followed by the bride and a long line of handmaidens.

Another delightful village was Lonkao. What struck me about this village was its innocence. Most of the boys and girls had very little in the way of clothes and were not in the least self-conscious about it. The morung was commodious, comfortable and clean and we were surrounded night and day by children, as well as by older boys and girls, some of them very attractive to look at. All day long they played round and in my camp. They did the tug-of-war, using a long creeper, with great gusto and loud cries of excitement. Some of them hopped about on one leg singing little songs. The babies were most attractive with their brass bracelets, cane-armlets and tails of squirrels hanging from their ears. Throughout the Wancho country the children of the great Chiefs

had unusual character and, as I have noticed elsewhere, I was struck by the fact that I hardly ever heard children cry. They are very rough, they fight, tear each other's hair, roll in the dust, are dragged along in the tug-of-war, fall headlong to the ground, but they don't cry. I remember two boys fighting, each with a baby tied to his back, and then it is true that the babies screamed in fright.

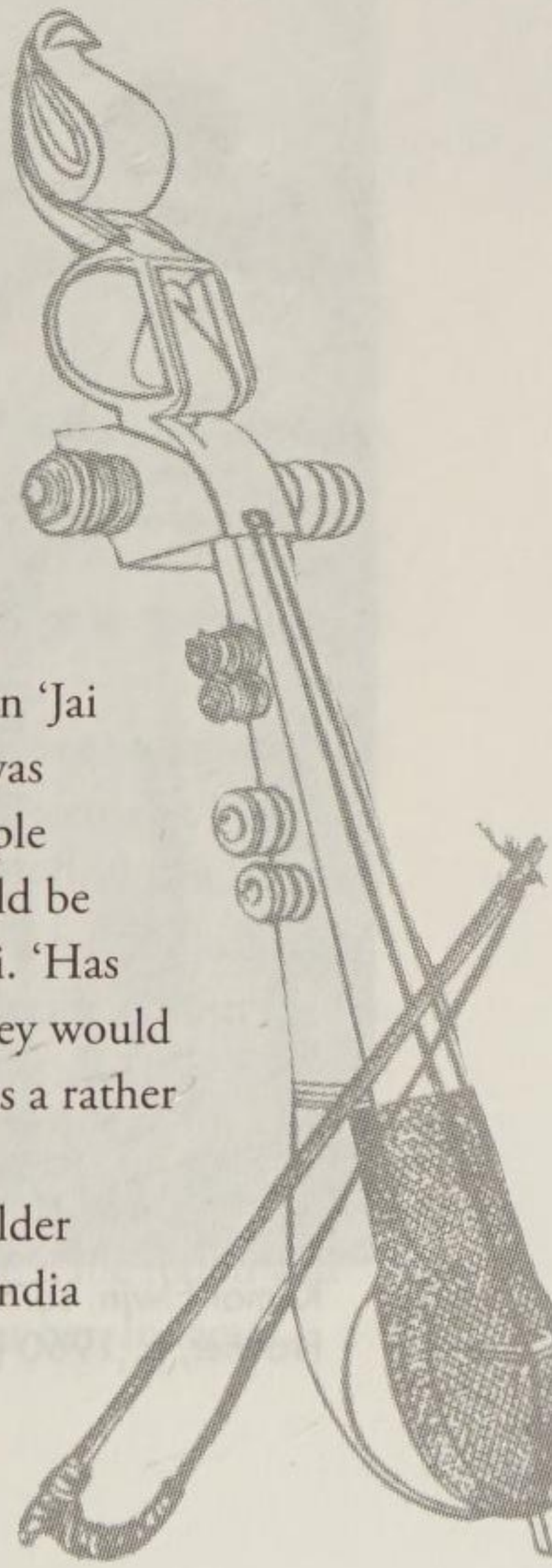
On our last day in this captivating village there was a great dance. We were woken very early by the thunder of the drums and all the morning the boys prepared their special decorations. At midday, the dance began. It was an attempt to recapture the old days of head-hunting, to which they all looked back as the time when they were really men. Three groups of gaily decorated Wanchos, armed to the teeth, crept up through the surrounding forest, put out scouts, came forward, retreated, then advanced and discharged their guns. One man got a wooden head which he put in his basket with shouts of triumph. Then they started dancing in a great circle, jogging about and waving guns and spears in the air. Every now and then the boys would let off their guns just behind me to aee me jump. This caused pleasure to one and all, though I myself was perhaps less amused than some.

Laju: A Nocte village on the
Patkoi Range in the map of Frontier Division

Later I made another long tour (this time Kumar was with me) right along the formidable slopes of the Patkai mountains up to Wakka, then across the Laju through the Hatut Nocte area and the Tangsa villages. Since then splendid roads have been built in the face of almost insuperable difficulties, but at the time of my own tours mechanized transport was not available and to my own great benefit I was forced to walk.

We first went into the Nocte country. The Noctes are a rather detribalized group, who have been in contact with the plains for centuries, and their dress was deplorable. But their villages were as interesting as any. Here were the skulls ranged in the morungs (village guard-houses), grim reminders of a day when head-hunting was the chief occupation of the people, and many stone pillars in memory of battles long ago.

After passing through the Nocte area, we marched eight miles over very steep and rough hills to Longkhai and were at once in a different world, in the beautiful and highly-coloured land of the remote Wanchos. Now, instead of trilby hats, sleazy singlets and dirty shorts, the pathetic symbols of 'civilization', we had waving plumes, the 'eternally dressed nakedness of the brown skin', ornaments, hand-woven cloth, gleaming brass waist-bands, and the most lovely scenery everywhere.



This is the country of the great Chiefs, who have vast houses, pitch dark inside, containing many wives and handmaidens, and people who are not quite slaves and who have to keep their heads shaven.

In certain parts of Tirap I found that the expression 'Jai Hind' (the common greeting of independent India) was being used as a proper noun to indicate what the simple tribesmen regarded as a person of importance. It would be used, for example, for a visitor from Shillong or Delhi. 'Has the Jai Hind arrived?' the people would inquire, or they would say, 'Please tell this to the Jai Hind.' I thought this was a rather pleasant variation on the usual 'sahib'.

As we went along, the country grew wilder and wilder until we reached the Patkai mountains which divide India from Burma.

For nearly three weeks we marched along the slopes of the Patkai rising from eight to nine thousand feet in a grim unbroken wall against the sky. For almost the whole of this period the mountains were shrouded in cloud and mist, and life got rather dreary with the incessant sunlessness and raw bitter wind. It was not so much the discomfort that was depressing as the fact that the people in such weather draped their beauty in dirty sheets and sat about miserably.

I shall never forget these inhospitable hills, lonely and desolate, with great valleys running up to the main wall between the bluffs and spurs that descend to the Tirap river. One such valley, which I never saw touched by the sun, was dominated by a village on a forest-clad spur—like something in *Dracula.* This was the fabled home of the dreaded Rangpangs, who until twenty years ago are believed to have practised human sacrifice. We went there and found them quiet and amiable, though rather cagey when it came to discussing their past history.

Kumar Elwin, somewhere on the Frontier, *c.* 1960 (OUP)

In the final lap of our journey we entered the Tangsa hills. Tangsa means 'children of Burma' and the people here have traditions of immigration from Burma and still have a decidedly Burmese look about them. They wear their hair in a top-knot and dress in sarongs of a pattern resembling a Scotch plaid. I greatly enjoyed the days spent in their company.

It was a long and interesting tour, full of contrasts—the sophisticated Noctes near the plains, then the delightful Wanchos full of colour and zest for living, then the opium-taking and impoverished people of the Hatut confederacy, and finally the handsome, picturesque Tangsas.

In some of the frontier villages the people had no interest in

money, and we had to get our supplies by barter; a box of matches for an egg, a string of beads or hank of yarn for a fowl; tea-leaves for rice. Kumar was specially expert at this and at one time kept a regular shop where we got specimens for our museum when the people would not part with them for money.

It was a long tour, about 160 miles, and we got a little tired towards the end. The last two marches were done in the rain and we finally arrived at a place called Changlang which was on a road, one of our development centres, in a marvellous state of damp and dirt. But we cleaned up and were preparing to spend a quiet night there when suddenly there was the hoot of a car—what a wonderful sound after all those weeks: I remember kissing the bonnet, the rough male kiss of motor transport—and out got Lila with Khemlal Rathee who had come up by Land-Rover to fetch us back. So there was hurried packing and at sunset we went down a very winding road, including a dozen hairpin bends, for Margherita and thus back to Shillong.

Ultimate Ambition

For the past nine years we have lived in Shillong and, though I have been frequently away on tour, often for long periods, it has become a real home. Kumar, who has joined the Assam Rifles, is not now with us here but the smaller boys have just reached the right age to make a nice, obstreperous, untidy establishment.

The children practise, or rather claim to hold, different religions. Kumar became a Roman Catholic when he was seventeen and in a position to choose for himself. Wasant claims to be a Hindu and refuses 'to eat cows'. Nakul declares himself a pagan. Ashok is a Buddhist, can recite some of the sacred verses and makes flower-offerings at our shrine. Lila and I profess no particular religion, though I have a strong 'feeling' for Buddhism.

Lila is the centre of this home; key of the house; store of happiness; Heaven's best gift to all of us. In Congreve's words, she is the moon and I the man in the moon: I am still slightly lunatic about her. In fact, I

Lila Elwin, c. 1963
(Sunil Janah/OUP)

love her even more today than when I first met her. What Arthur Koestler calls 'the normal, neutralizing effect of habituation' has had no effect on us.

I am a very lucky man—to have a young and exquisite wife who keeps me young.

Lila has extraordinary powers of adaptation. She came to Shillong almost direct from a remote tribal village, yet within three months was proving an admirable hostess at parties, and even when our few VIPS came to visit us she was thrown off balance less than I was.

But Lila remains, I am glad to say, a villager at heart. She is always wanting to be growing things and loves animals, and especially our young Alsatian, Rani. She works very hard in the house and has become an expert at knitting. She has, as they say, great 'character', can be very determined and, like most tribal folk, quickly sees through humbug and pretence. I myself tend to enthuse too quickly after meeting people but she is a better judge and much more cautious than I am. She is very kind; she is strict with people but at the least trouble her heart melts, and if she finds that anyone associated with us has not had a square meal she cannot eat herself until this is remedied.

Ashok was born in Shillong on a Sunday. From the early morning Lila began to get contractions, but she said nothing about it for, as she explained, 'No one labours on a Sunday in Shillong, so I can't labour either.'

I thought she wasn't very well, and made her lie down a good deal, but I was not actually expecting anything for another week. Fortunately, a nice girl called Gita Mehta (now Trivedi), who was a doctor, came to tea. It was Victor's birthday—he was staying with us at the time—and

we had a chocolate cake with HAPPY BIRTHDAY VICTOR on it. Phukan came, the man who looked after me so well in Manipur, an authority on PGW. Then this girl Gita arrived with Aporbo Chanda, once Director of Public Instruction for Bengal, now retired, a great character. And on top of all there was dear old Ganpat Rai, a Forest Officer, with a present of an outsize bunch of green bananas.

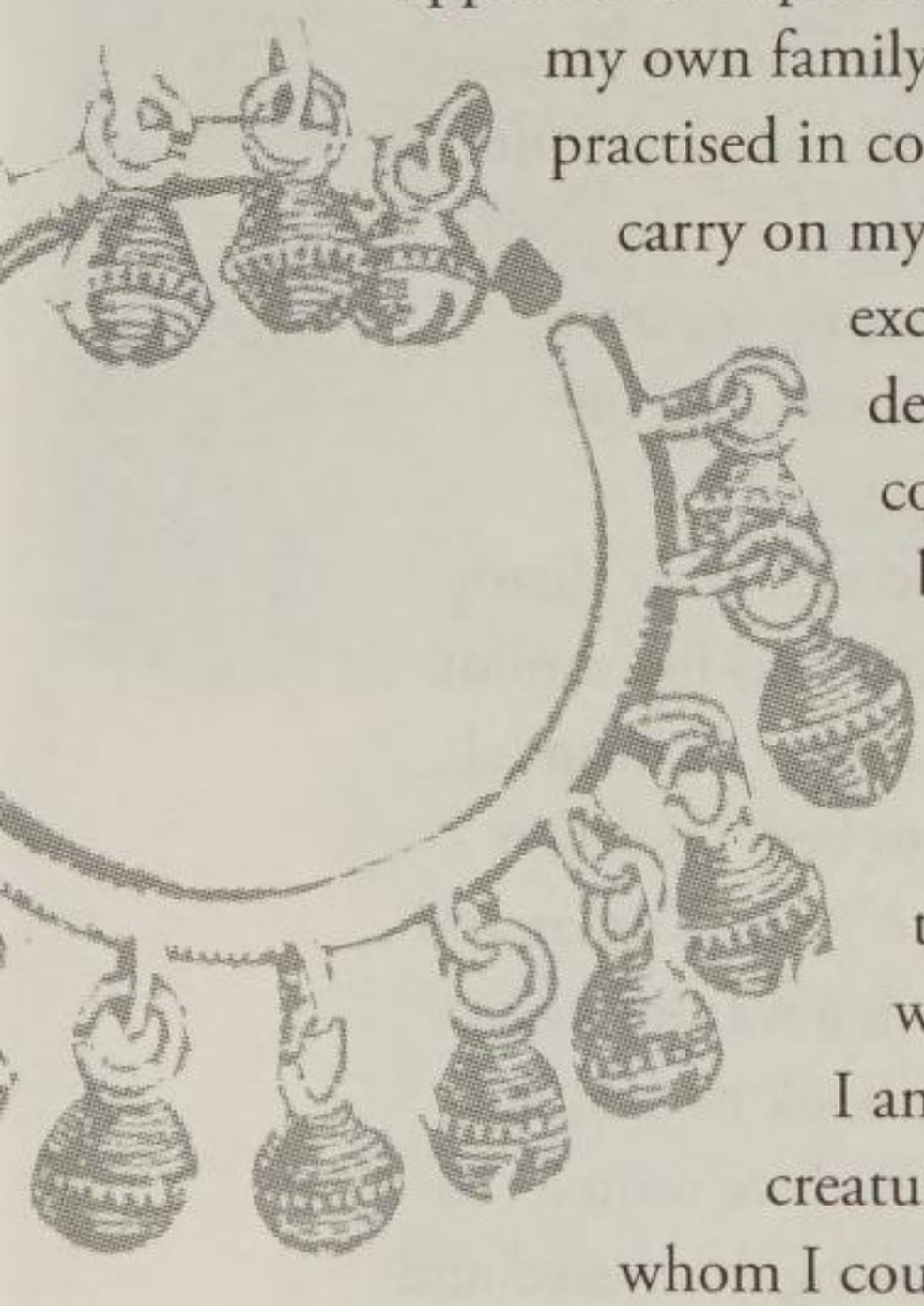
In the middle of this, Phukan talking about Lord Emsworth's pig, Aporbo holding forth on T.S. Eliot, Victor lecturing on the decline of the West, and dear old Ganpat describing how he had 'trampled two hundred serpents under foot' during his travels in NEFA, all talking at once, Gita came in and said that if we didn't get Lila to hospital immediately she'd be having the baby in the drawing-room. So we all got busy. Gita tried to telephone the hospital: the entire staff was at church, no one could do anything. At last a Sister turned up who said, couldn't the lady come tomorrow, they didn't like doing things on Sunday. So we decided to go ahead, packing, finding blankets, getting the ayah ready, calming the children, while all the time Aporbo boomed on indefatigably, now about Dylan Thomas.

Finally we got into the car, Lila, the ayah, Gita and me, with Victor driving. The car wouldn't go very well, and I said Victor was like a pilot carrying an atom bomb in an old Dakota. But we reached the hospital at last, found a Sister, got a very nice room, put Lila to bed, and then came back for dinner. At 10.0 we returned, we being Victor, Kumar and me, with blankets for an all-night vigil. We were put in a waiting-room, where Victor got hold of one of the hospital Bibles, a book he said he had often meant to read but had never got round to, and we waited. To our astonishment, at 11.10 p.m. dear Dr Hughes, looking exhausted and dishevelled—he at least never gets a Sunday off—peeped in and said, 'It's a boy.' After some time we were admitted to the Labour Room and there was Lila looking a bit worn on a stretcher which I helped push down to her ward, with the baby screaming away, looking rather charming. Lila was full of dope and sleepy, so we said good-night and came home at midnight. And that is how Ashok got his start.

Of all the delightful things in the world, children are the best and of them all tribal children are incomparable. It is they who have made life bearable for me at times when life was hard to bear, whether in the Mandla villages, where they were the best of company, or on many

tours, or at home in Shillong. Their liveliness makes our gloom absurd, their beauty is reviving and since they are the very symbols of hope and expectation, they are a cure for anxiety and disappointment. Children have always been among the chief loves of my life.

In Patangarh, our house was always full of Gond and Pardhan children. I had a very large writing table which made an ideal place for hide-and-seek and other games. At any time of the day you could find children underneath it playing quietly or climbing about on top of it. This must, you will say, have been rather disturbing to a writer, but in the course of time it helped me to develop very strong powers of concentration. When I myself see somebody writing anything I approach on tiptoe and speak in a whisper. Nobody in a village or in my own family has ever done this for me. In time I became so practised in concentrating in the midst of turmoil that I could carry on my writing without any disturbance or irritation, except, of course, when I was pulled away from my desk and made to go on hands and knees with a couple of children on my back. At first I was a horse but later as I swelled a little they decided I was an elephant and Kumar once insisted that I was a hippopotamus.



Again on tour, whether in central India or the frontier, my camps have always been crowded with children, for I think they feel instinctively that I am on their side. Some of the most attractive young creatures I have seen anywhere were the Bondo boys, of whom I could say with Dr Johnson: 'I love the young dogs of this age.' Other children became so intimate and at-home that they would pull my cigar out of my mouth, take a puff or two themselves, sometimes handing it round from friend to friend, and then return it between my lips. In some villages, particularly the Saora villages where children used to drop in at meal-times, I sometimes had a regular battle to get any food at all, with a group of boys and girls stretching out eager hands for what there was on my plate and even helping themselves.

In NEFA one of the things that used to depress me was the habit of the village elders driving away children from my camp because they thought that the sahib would be annoyed. It generally took a little explanation before they could believe that he really enjoyed the company of children.

The tribal people themselves, however, have a very great love for their children and some of my most heartbreaking moments have been at children's funerals or sitting helplessly by when a child was dying.

To turn from this great family to the more immediate one of our own children. Kumar, the eldest, was very charming as a small boy and a good companion when he got older—he did two long tours on foot with me, a couple of hundred miles each time, in northern Siang, and also went to Tirap. Wasant also, at eight and nine years, went out twice with me, and Nakul and Ashok joined him when we all went to Lungleh, an exciting drive through the remote and lovely Lushai hills.

It is always fun taking the children by air. One day great clouds rolled up and I was looking at them with apprehension when Wasant said, 'Daddy, the clouds look like angels. There's nothing to be afraid of.' When we went into them and it got very bumpy, the orange lights flashing on, he said excitedly, 'Do you think we can have a crash?' And afterwards, when I asked Nakul if he had been afraid, he said, 'Why should I have been? I had my seat-belt on.'

The children have developed their own vocabulary of essentially amiable denunciation. Ashok is the most original. 'You nonsense,' he says, an admirable adaptation. 'Get out, you fat English,' he attacks me if I refuse to 'pass him' four annas. When he was about three years old, my sister Eldyth came to stay with us. A few days after her arrival Ashok got annoyed with her about something, and a stream of four-letter Hindi words poured from his baby lips.

'What is the sweet little darling saying?' asked Eldyth.

I explained hastily that he was telling her how much he liked her and how glad he was that she was here.

When Eldyth went away, Nakul—then about four—squeezed her arm and said, 'Very good meat.'

My Patel Memorial lectures on 'A Philosophy of Love' were broadcast: Ashok heard bits of them, and made his own contribution. 'When I grow up,' he said, 'I'm not going to marry a pretty girl, for then hundreds of mens would run after her to do loving and would say, "Come, come to me, my girl-friend".'

Of the younger boys, Wasant is sensitive and affectionate; Nakul is sensible, hard-working, very popular at school and a wonderful patient when he is ill; Ashok is full of ideas and excels as a businessman.

Wasant is the one to whom things happen. One evening when he was very small an almirah, full of books, toppled ever on top of him, but fortunately was caught on a stool and although he was badly frightened by the cascade of books he was not injured. One year in Delhi I took Lila and the children to watch the Republic Day parade. There were a million people there and when it was over and we were going out, Wasant, then eight years old, got lost in the crowd. We had been hearing frightening stories about child-kidnappers and Ashok described how he had seen Wasant walking away with an old beggar woman, which greatly added to our anxiety. It was an agonizing experience, for we felt helpless, almost paralysed as we thought of this tiny child from quiet Shillong in the vast crowds that thronged the great city. There were police camps for missing children and we went to them, finding in each twenty or thirty small boys and girls crying for their mothers. But though we looked eagerly into their faces, there was no sign of Wasant. Khemlal Rathee brought his car and sent for his astrologer who worked it out that Wasant would return after about five hours, though I must confess this did not greatly console me. We drove round and round Delhi, our apprehension increasing each hour that passed. I got hold of one of our younger officers, Tapan Kumar Barua, then in Delhi, who had accompanied me on tour when Wasant was with me, and he went out on an independent search. By 5.30 poor Lila was almost hysterical and I do not think I have ever felt quite so despairing, for by then most of us and even the Rathees were afraid that the child had been kidnapped.

And then at just about the time that the astrologer had prophesied, a taxi drew up and out got Tapan Kumar with a beaming Wasant. For the first time in my life I burst into tears, the relief was so great. Wasant was full of his adventures. He had wandered through the crowds, not specially frightened, for he was sure we would find him, until he was discovered by a kindly policeman who had given him biscuits and shown him his revolver. But it was a long time before Lila fully recovered from the strain of those few hours.

Whenever I am ill, Wasant gets very worried about me, looks after me and constantly inquires how I am. Like many Indian children, he confuses 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow', since they both translate the same Hindi word, and every day for months he used to say, 'Are you better than you were tomorrow, Daddy?', which gave me a pleasant science-fiction sensation as if I had got out of the time-space continuum. One

day I had a slight relapse and I shall never forget how Wasant, observing this, began to scream in panic, tears pouring down his face. The love that moment of anxiety revealed was one of the precious things in my life.

Ashok is the businessman of the family. When he was only four years old he exclaimed, 'Daddy, I do love money.' He often refuses to go to the cinema when the other boys do and demands compensation instead. If he has to have an injection, he charges a suitable fee. He makes little portable shops and sells things to everyone. He collects stamps, which has great commercial possibilities. He has a special interest in medals, or at least in their monetary value, as all the family has. I have been lucky in getting a number of them from academic societies in India and England. The attitude of Ashok to them is simple. If they are bronze, like my Rivers or Wellcome medals, he is not interested: they won't fetch anything. But anything in gold is another matter. I have three—the Roy and Annandale from the Asiatic Society in Calcutta and a nice heavy one, the Campbell, from its opposite number in Bombay. There is a rush to get the letter-weight machine from the office, and Ashok and the others weigh them and make elaborate calculations to discover how much they are worth at present prices.

I am not ferocious enough to be a good father. My attitude to children is Thomas More's in his epistle *To his sweetest children*:

> I have given you, forsooth, kisses in plenty and but few stripes.
> If ever I have flogged you 'twas but with a peacock's tail.

Part of the family about whom I must say a word is my personal staff, in whom I have been very fortunate. My stenographer, Someswar Lahiri, who has been with me now for eight years, is loyal and efficient; my two Khasi typists, Higher Land Syiemlieh (now promoted) and Lockhart Jyrwa, are as good as anyone could desire. My field-assistant, Sundarlal Narmada, has been with me now for over thirty years, my two chaprasis—Haricharan and Bhajan—for about twenty-five. Sundarlal has gone with me on nearly all my tours and is an able and effective organizer. My usual practice on tour is to send Sundarlal and Bhajan ahead—they walk twice as fast as I do—to prepare camp, and Haricharan goes with me to help me over bridges and sometimes to pull me up very steep ascents. The result is that when I reach camp, I find a little shed erected, my things laid out in

dormitory or house, and a hot meal nearly always ready. How they manage to cook, and cook well, under the most difficult conditions has always been a mystery to me.

Both Haricharan and Bhajan are tribal Pardhans but they sometimes find it a little difficult to put up with their more primitive brethren and their habit of crowding the little kitchens on tour, fingering and examining everything with absorbed interest. There was once a heated dispute when Bhajan opened a tin of ham and some Wanchos insisted that it was human flesh. Once, when a group of 'naked' Bondos was rude to him, Haricharan exclaimed, 'May tigers munch their bare bottoms *kirach karach*!'

Sundarlal, who is not tribal, has a tender and sympathetic attitude: his trouble has been with what Bertrand Russell has called 'the insolent aristocracy of jacks-in-office' and one day, when he was in Patangarh and I in Calcutta, he sent me a telegram: HAVE KICKED POLICEMAN COME AT ONCE. Victor and I hastened to the rescue, and it was just as well for, though the kick was eminently justified and didn't really hurt, one could hardly expect the police to appreciate it.

Although in the earlier years in central India I had a long struggle to keep going, for I often fell ill, since coming to Shillong I have generally enjoyed excellent health and so have Lila and the children. But when we do fall ill we make the most of Lt. I have given a lurid description of a three months' stay in a Bombay hospital in my *Leaves from the Jungle.*

When I was in East Africa I began to develop mysterious pains. I went to a specialist in Nairobi who subjected me to the usual indignities. When he had completed the drill he produced a report which I secretly considered highly offensive. Among other things, this is what it said:

The stomach is of high transverse type. Its mucosal pattern is coarse, particularly in the distal third where it appears almost polypoid.

At that time I was getting a little stout and, being rather sensitive about my corporation, to have it called polypoid was the last straw and I went on a diet immediately and this was a great strain. Alexander Woolcott once said that all the things he really liked were immoral, illegal or fattening.

The cholecystogram revealed that I had no fewer than two gall-bladders and my specialist wanted to operate at once and urged me to

go into the very fine hospital in Nairobi and have it done. I discovered, however, that this hospital, at least at that time, would not admit coloured patients and I probably saved my life (for I heard afterwards that it would have been a very tricky operation) by refusing to go into a place to which Africans and Indians would not be admitted. When I returned to Bombay I had to go through an entire fortnight of further examination but, apart from a few pills and a quite ferocious diet-chart, the doctors there decided that it would be better not to operate. In the past ten years, these two gall-bladders, which my specialist told me were at that time only the twenty-eighth recorded in medical history—there was great excitement in a Bombay hospital when my X-ray picture was developed—have given me little trouble. By a policy of masterly inaction, I hope I have got them in hand.

In June 1961 I had an exciting attack of coronary insufficiency, and was rushed to the Military Hospital in Shillong, where there is a staff of brilliant Army doctors and sisters. I was allowed no visitors for ten days, which made me feel very important, but Lila of course came and Nari Rustomji, who is an angel when one is ill, slipped in twice a day and brought me most of Somerset Maugham's stories which, curiously enough, I had never read.

I had begun six months previously with high blood-pressure and the *rauwolfia serpentina,* one of India's oldest drugs, given for this made me feel as if I was perpetually detumescent after an unsatisfactory performance. But the tranquillizers I got later were delicious.

They had little bits of paper wrapped round them saying what they did for you. One, I was told, saved me from mental and emotional disturbance, another cured my dysmenorrhoea, morning sickness and bed-wetting: a third enabled me to have a baby in comfort. I was soon free of anxiety and nephrogenic hypertension. I also got some injections that the doctor said would make me a new man. The phials were filled with nor-androstenolene phenylpropionate dissolved in oil, which sounded as if it would make a new man of anything, but I was mortified to read a note saying that it was indicated for the 'treatment of men when increased libido was undesirable'.

The doctor told me that I should ration myself to 'one peg of gin a day', for gin is a coronary dilatant and does one good. He forgot, however, to mention whether it should be big or small, and I didn't pursue the matter. In fact, I have drunk very little for a long time now.

Alcohol I would not miss, tobacco is a much sterner tyrant. The trouble is that I *believe* in tobacco: it has made me a better man.

But to be serious for a moment. Pain, which Schweitzer calls 'a more terrible lord of mankind than even Death himself', yet does not deny some blessing to a family: it holds it together in strong bonds of compassionate affection. One year Lila was tormented by a stone, another year she had an acute appendicitis, and it was when she was in hospital that we all realized how much we loved her. It was when I myself was ill that I in turn realized how Lila and the boys felt about me. It is in sickness that we see how love, and all the beautiful things that come from it, can not only make suffering bearable and bring out of distress the possibility of spiritual growth, but can itself act as a healing force.

I recently had a second bout of trouble with the one organ I had always thought was tough and durable: I did not have the distinction of a thrombosis, but was on a lower level altogether, only some myocardiac insufficiency. But the doctors take even this seriously: 'your life,' they said, 'must now be regular, moderate, cautious'—what depressing adjectives these are! In fact, of all the things that have happened to me, more even than leaving the Church or changing my nationality, this has demanded the greatest mental adjustment.

The Fall of a Sparrow

'...there's a special providence
in the fall of a sparrow.'
Hamlet, V.ii.232–3

SÁLIM ALI

Sálim Ali (1896–1987), the Grand Old Man of Indian Ornithology, was among the first Indians to carry out systematic bird surveys in the country and conduct expeditions to almost every part of the Indian subcontinent. The ten-volume *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*, which he co-authored with S. Dillon Ripley, is an important landmark in ornithological studies. His books have contributed enormously to the development of professional and amateur ornithology in India.

To 'Hawk' (R.E. Hawkins, OUP India's General Manager, 1937–70) for first instilling the thought that my story might be worth telling.

Special Providence

UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO, THE QUESTION OF HOW MY INTEREST IN BIRDS originated never bothered me or anyone else. I grew up with it and the oddness was taken for granted—that was that. It was only much later, after the question was put to me by an inquisitive press reporter, that I began giving thought to the matter. I then realized that, considering my early background, his query was actually less irrelevant than it first appeared. Eighty-seven years is a long time to remember details, but I vividly recall our rambling family house in Khetwadi, a middle-class residential quarter of Bombay, in the now overcrowded area between Girgaum and Charni Road. Here I lived as the youngest of an orphaned family of five brothers and four sisters: my mother Zeenat-un-nissa had died when I was about three and my father Moizuddin two years earlier. We grew up under the loving care of a maternal uncle, Amiruddin Tyabji, and his childless wife, Hamida Begam, who were more to us all than any parents could be. They were guardians as well to a miscellaneous assortment of other orphans and children of absentee friends and relations of different ages, and very variable—sometimes even dubious—quality. There was no one in that very mixed ménage who, as far as I can remember, was at all interested in birds, except perhaps as ingredients of an occasional festive *pulao*.

'Nature conservation' was then a phrase only rarely heard. Partridges and quails were abundantly and freely sold in the market, and six to

Father and Mother with five. Four more to come! *c.* 1889

eight birds per rupee of the former and sixteen to twenty of the latter made them cheap enough as a variant, on high days and holidays, of the eternal *murghi*, costing perhaps 6 to 8 *annas* (35 to 50 paise). The birds used to be brought alive to the Khetwadi house, crowded in round flat bamboo baskets with a burlap flap on top, and 'lawfully' *halalled* (had their throats slit). I well remember how, when about ten years old, Suleiman (a nephew two years my junior) and I used to rescue a few of these unfortunates on the sly and keep them as pets in a rough-and-ready open-air pen, made from wire mesh and old packing cases, with the help of Nannoo, the trusty old cook and factotum of the family and us children's unfailing friend, abettor and accomplice in all such enterprises. The 'aviary' was run in partnership by Suleiman and myself and it gave us immense joy to sit beside the enclosure and watch the behaviour and action of the birds—among which our favourites were named—for hours together. On school holidays it was certainly a far pleasanter way of passing time than doing homework.

We made as frequent excursions as our pocket money of Rs 2 per month would permit to the bird section of Crawford Market to see if any new birds had arrived which could be added to our collection. In the early days our interest was confined chiefly to game birds, and our

collection consisted of Grey and Painted Partridges, and Grey, Rain and Bush Quails. Occasionally when feeling particularly flush, as after a birthday celebration, we would acquire a pair or two of Grey Junglefowl or Red Spurfowl. But I never was nor have been successful in keeping captive birds and other animals or pets alive for long. After repeated disappointment and failure I finally gave up trying; and though I have from time to time in later years kept birds for various experimental purposes, I have always released them thereafter.

About this time, when I was about nine or ten, the father/uncle with whom we lived and whom we boys greatly hero-worshipped for his shikar exploits presented me with an air gun. I well remember that it was a nickel-plated 500-shot repeater 'Daisy'—a popular make in those days, more toy than gun. In spite of its shortcomings I soon acquired enough cunning with it to shoot house sparrows, of which a colony used to be in permanent residence in the stable. Spilt grain from the horses' nose-bags, sundry holes in the ceiling and walls for nests provided them with bountiful living. We boys, being correctly brought up as God-fearing Muslim children, knew that although the sparrow fell within the category of lawful meat, it could only be eaten provided the birds had been halalled in the ordained manner. Under fear of dire consequences in the hereafter, and with timely warning from our elders, we were usually scrupulous in observing the ritual, but even at the risk of purgatory were sometimes tempted to cheat by cajoling Nannoo to cut their throats even after the birds were long dead and cold. Nannoo taught us how to deal with the sparrows after correct obsequies had been performed, and some of us little boys became expert at transforming them, with *masala*, a blob of ghee and a frying-pan, into delicious morsels.

The very first bird note I ever made was during this era, at the age of nine or ten. It concerned an incident in the course of one of those sparrow hunts in that Khetwadi stable. Wooden pegs had been driven into the wall, on which harness was hung. One of these pegs had come off, leaving a hole in the wall which became a coveted nesting place for the sparrows. The observation made was on a female sparrow nesting in that hole. Crude and incomplete as it was when rediscovered nearly sixty years later, the gist of the note seemed relevant enough for publication in *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, more or less in its original form, thus:

1906/7. The cock sparrow perched on the nail near the entrance to the hole while the female sat inside on the eggs. I ambushed them from behind a stabled carriage and shot the male. In a very short while the female acquired another male who also sat 'on guard' on the nail outside. I shot this male also, and again in no time the female had yet another male in attendance. In the next 7 days I shot 8 male sparrows from this perch; each time the female seemed to have another male in waiting who immediately stepped into the gap of the deceased husband.

I am rather proud of this note because though intended as a record of my prowess as a hunter and made long before I was conscious of any possible relevance, it has proved more meaningful in the light of present-day behavioural studies.

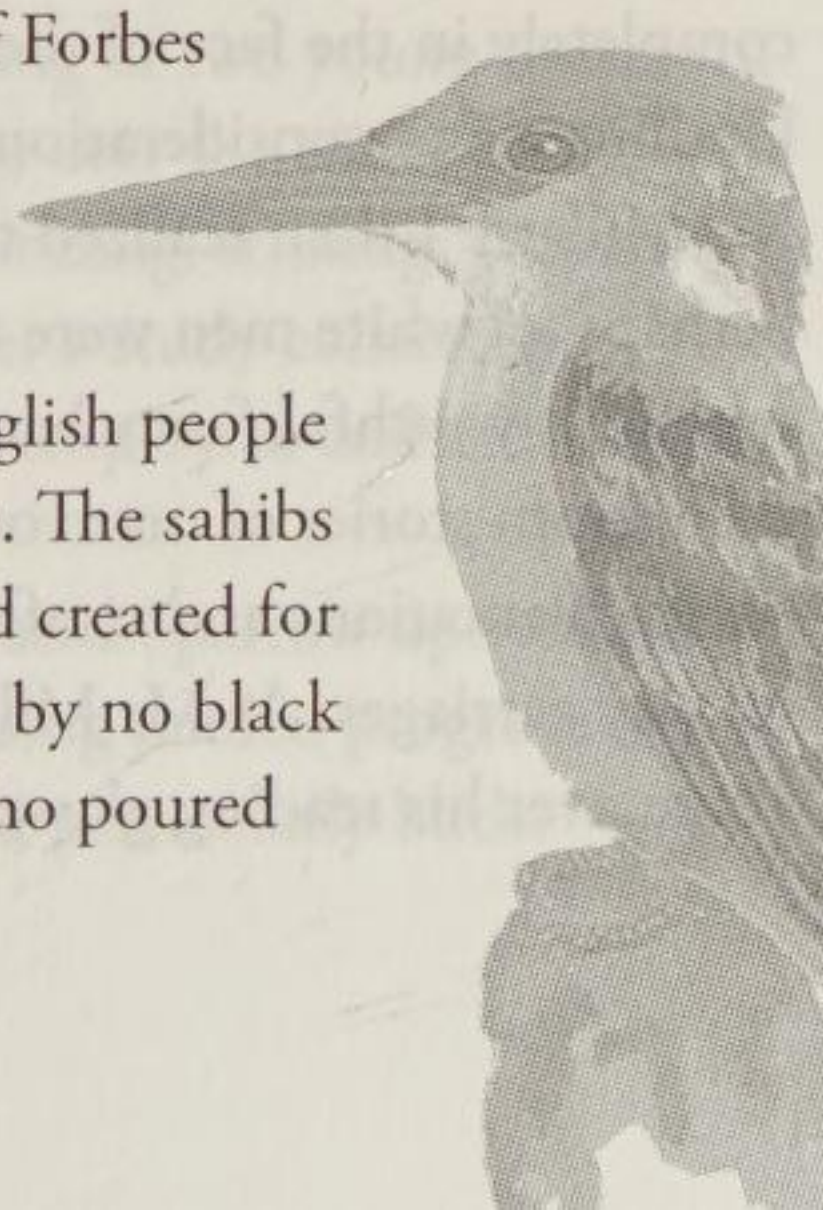
Each year when school vacations began in summer, the entire Khetwadi ménage migrated to Chembur—now a noisy part of metropolitan Bombay, but in those days a delightfully quiet sylvan haven of secondary moist-deciduous jungle set among outlying hillocks of the Western Ghats. The highest of these, Trombay Hill, just over 300 metres and the venue of our youthful mountaineering exploits, now forms part of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre's estate. It was thickly wooded in parts till uniformly denuded into a veritable Rock of Gibraltar by the relentless fuel-hunters of the janata colony which was established round its base after the Second World War. The Chembur of those days is memorable for its peaceful jungle flavour and the considerable wildlife it held despite its closeness to the city. The nearest railway station, Kurla, was three miles by foot or bullock cart. There were no industries, shopping facilities, schools or other social amenities in the neighbourhood. Motor cars and buses had not invaded the scene and practically no commuters resided in the locality.

Like idle and thoughtless schoolboys everywhere, with no notion of the ethics of sport (whatever they be!) or conservation instilled into us either at home or in school—on the contrary with a certain Victorian aura attached to hunting and shooting as a manly sport—we roamed the countryside with our air guns, making a target of every little bird trusting enough to permit a close approach. I recall my juvenile elation if I managed to drop a honeysucker or similar small bird in this vandalistic sport. Happily, such occasions were rare. Part of a more regular hunting programme of us gangsters was to visit the tiny neighbouring hamlet of Deonar near sunset when large numbers of House Sparrows collected

to roost among the stacks of rice-straw, piled up in trees to keep it out of reach of hungry cattle. The sparrows came just as it was getting dark and hurriedly tunnelled their way into the straw, and our strategy was to keep ready for their arrival and sportingly pot only the males before they disappeared within. The forays to Deonar often served a dual purpose since the family supply of eggs, vegetables and milk came from this village, and we were commissioned to bring back the hut-to-hut egg collection along with our own bag of 'game'. (Eggs cost one *phadia* or 4 pies or 1/48 of the old rupee!) As far as I can recall it was at this point, and as a fortuitous offshoot of one of these sparrow-hunting expeditions, that my first 'scientific' interest in birds was born.

While one of my victims was about to be halalled I suspected something was wrong with the bird: it looked like any other female sparrow I sometimes got except that it had a yellow patch on the throat, like a curry-stain. My main concern at this moment was whether this sparrow was lawful meat for a God-fearing little Muslim or not. Unwilling to jeopardize my prospects in the hereafter, I prevented the halalling and instead carried the corpse back to the house to obtain an authentic pronouncement (*fatwa*) from Uncle Amiruddin, the shikari of the family. He examined the sparrow carefully and agreed that it was a different bird, apparently not having noticed one like it before. Uncle Amiruddin was one of the earliest Indian members of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), having joined it soon after its founding in 1883, and became an active participant in its work. He gave me a letter of introduction to the then Honorary Secretary, Mr W.S. Millard, the head of Phipson & Co., Wine Merchants, asking his help in identifying the bird. My very first contact with the Society, then housed in the premises occupied by Phipsons, came about in this way. That visit was a thrilling experience and is still fresh in my memory.

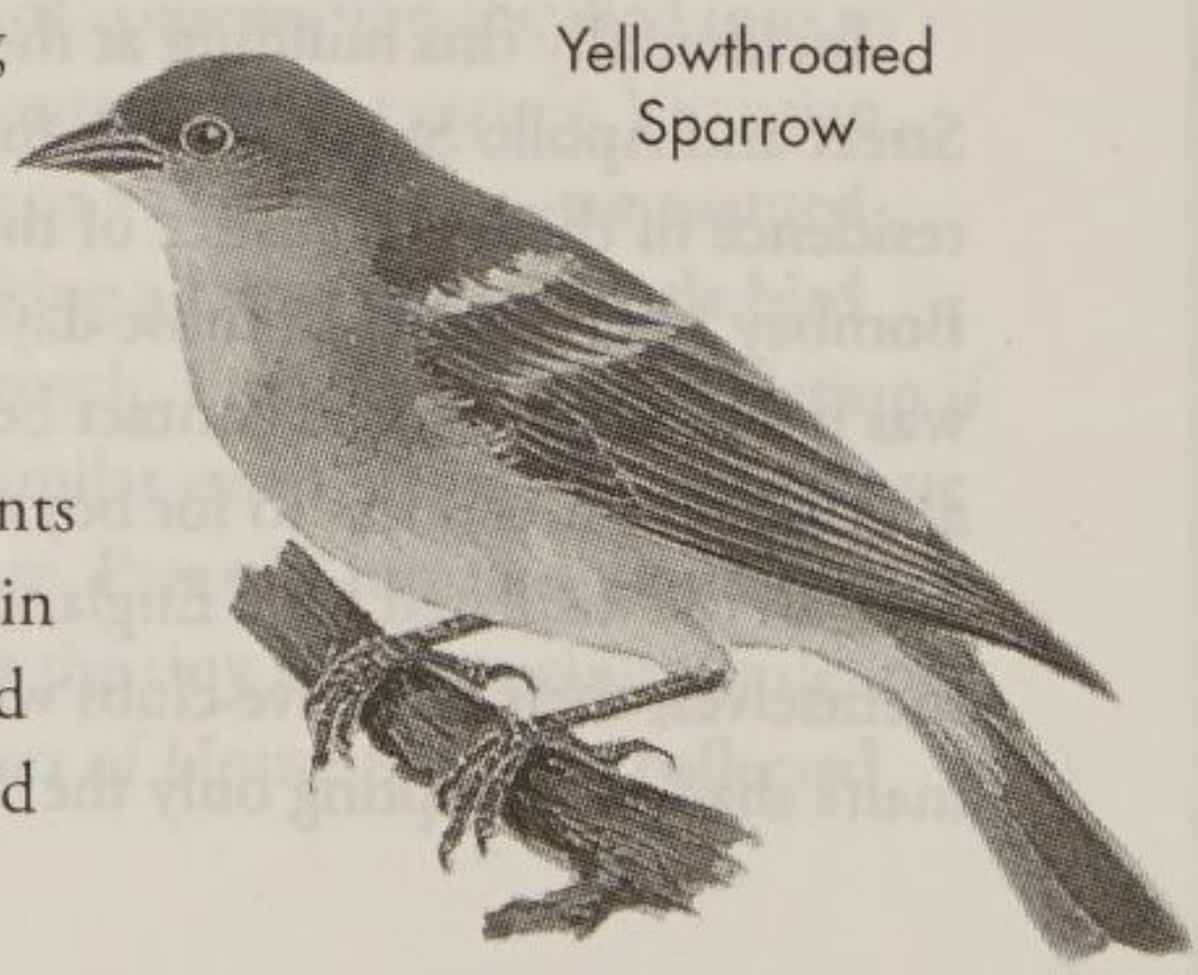
Incidentally this building at the corner of Forbes Street and Apollo Street was the former residence of the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court. In those days there was practically no social contact between English people and Indians, much less so for boys of my age. The sahibs lived in the insulated little Englands they had created for themselves; their exclusive clubs were defiled by no black man's shadow, excepting only the 'bearers' who poured



out their *chhota* and *bara* pegs. They had built around themselves a mythical aura about their nobility and greatness and superior virtues, about carrying the black man's burden and all that. This myth took such firm root that even after forty years of Independence it still survives. It was a rare occurrence for a middle-class Indian to meet and talk to an Englishman, official or otherwise, except purely on matters of business. A schoolboy's only contact with the English was perhaps when his classroom was visited annually by an educational inspector who, of course, always had to be a sahib.

I remember the feeling of nervousness—almost of fear and trembling—at the prospect of meeting a full-grown sahib face to face with which I entered the quaint old single-storeyed building through its magnificent solid teakwood portal. After due checking of my bona fides I was led up the shallow coir carpeted steps by a supercilious khaki-liveried sepoy, the flanking walls covered with mounted heads of shikar trophies in terrifying profusion. Upstairs, in a corner of the wooden-floored room chock-a-block with desk showcases displaying seashells, butterflies, birds' eggs and miscellaneous natural history bric-a-brac, the walls were still more crowded with skulls and mounted heads of tigers and leopards staring glassily down at the intruder, or snarling with bared fangs more ferociously than they ever did in life. I was piloted to the sanctum sanctorum through this welter of animal remnants, stumbling over stuffed crocodiles and hoofs of sambar floor-rugs. In a corner of this congested junk shop, which was the Society's museum in those days, and partitioned off by swing doors, sat, leaning over his desk, the genial bald-headed Walter Samuel Millard, the Honorary Secretary.

This must have been somewhere in 1908, and my first contact with the BNHS was later to become such an important element in the shaping of my life and career. All my nervousness vanished completely in the face of the charming kindliness and consideration of Mr Millard. I then realized that perhaps *all* white men were not the ogres our youthful fancy had painted them from stories of unsavoury incidents on tea plantations and confrontations in railway carriages. As Mr Millard peered at me over his reading glasses I fumbled



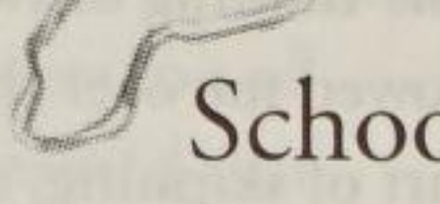
Yellowthroated Sparrow

out my credentials and the little paper packet containing the mystery bird. He identified it at a glance as a Yellowthroated Sparrow (*Petronia xanthocollis*) and bid me to follow him to the reference cabinets, from one of which he produced several stuffed specimens for confirmation. There were numerous other species of sparrows in the collection, which he took great pains to show me, and explained the differences and points for identification. He patiently opened drawer after drawer for me to see the hundreds of different birds found in the Indian Empire, and I believe it was at this moment that my curiosity about birds really clicked. Mr Millard gave me a few bird books from the small library to read, and this is how I made my first acquaintance with Edward Hamilton Aitken's (EHA's) inimitable classics—*Common Birds of Bombay* and *A Naturalist on the Prowl*. They spurred my interest, and I have since read them again and again over the last sixty years or more with undiminished pleasure and admiration.

Mr Millard encouraged me to make a collection of birds as the best way of learning about them, and offered to have me trained at the Society in skinning and preserving specimens and keeping proper notes about them. He introduced me to a young Englishman in the next room who had lately been recruited as the first paid Curator of the Society. This was Norman Boyd Kinnear who, later, after the First World War, joined the Bird Room of the British Museum (Natural History) and ended up as Sir Norman Kinnear, Director of the Museum, in 1947–50. Kinnear, a dour Scotsman, appeared to me rather stand-offish and reserved, and therefore outwardly at least more like the *pukka* sahib of our youthful conception. Behind this façade of stand-offishness, however, he was rather shy, but kindly and helpful, and did much to encourage and foster my new-born enthusiasm, both during his curatorship of the Society and later from the Bird Room of the British Museum. He put me under the training of two young assistants, S.H. Prater and P.F. Gomes. They showed me over the entire bird collection and initiated me into the art of skinning, stuffing, preparing and labelling bird and mammal specimens for a study collection. Both these persons remained in the Society's employ to end of their working lives.

The fortuitous incident of the Yellowthroated Sparrow opened up undreamt vistas for me. Thenceforth my reading tended progressively towards books on general natural history, and particularly birds.

Illustrated books on Indian birds were virtually non-existent in those days, and indeed for many years later, and there was little available to help a beginner in identifying and learning about the birds around him. The absence of illustrated books was in my opinion the most serious obstacle to the development of bird-watching as an outdoor hobby among Indians generally. Thus, most people who contributed to bird study in India in the early years were foreigners—mostly Englishmen—who had grown up in their home country in the time-honoured British natural history tradition and were already familiar with bird lore—if only as egg-collecting schoolboys—before they came out to India. Spurred by the wealth of bird life around them here, and perhaps by the opportunities as well as the social constraints in the lonely life of a district officer in the backwoods, some of them took to sport-shooting and natural history as a serious pastime, or to collecting bird skins and eggs. Many blossomed in course of time into scholarly naturalists or highly competent ornithologists who helped to lay the foundation of scientific natural history in India. Jerdon's *Birds of India* (1864) and later the four-volume publication on Indian avifauna by Oates and Blanford (1898) were adequate for identification, provided you had an elementary familiarity with birds, the necessary ferreting zeal and a specimen in hand. The lack of illustrated field guides and good field glasses, however, seriously inhibited the cult of bird-watching as we know it today. There is no doubt that I owe the beginning of my serious interest in birds to that enigmatic Yellowthroated Sparrow and the chain of events it brought in its train.



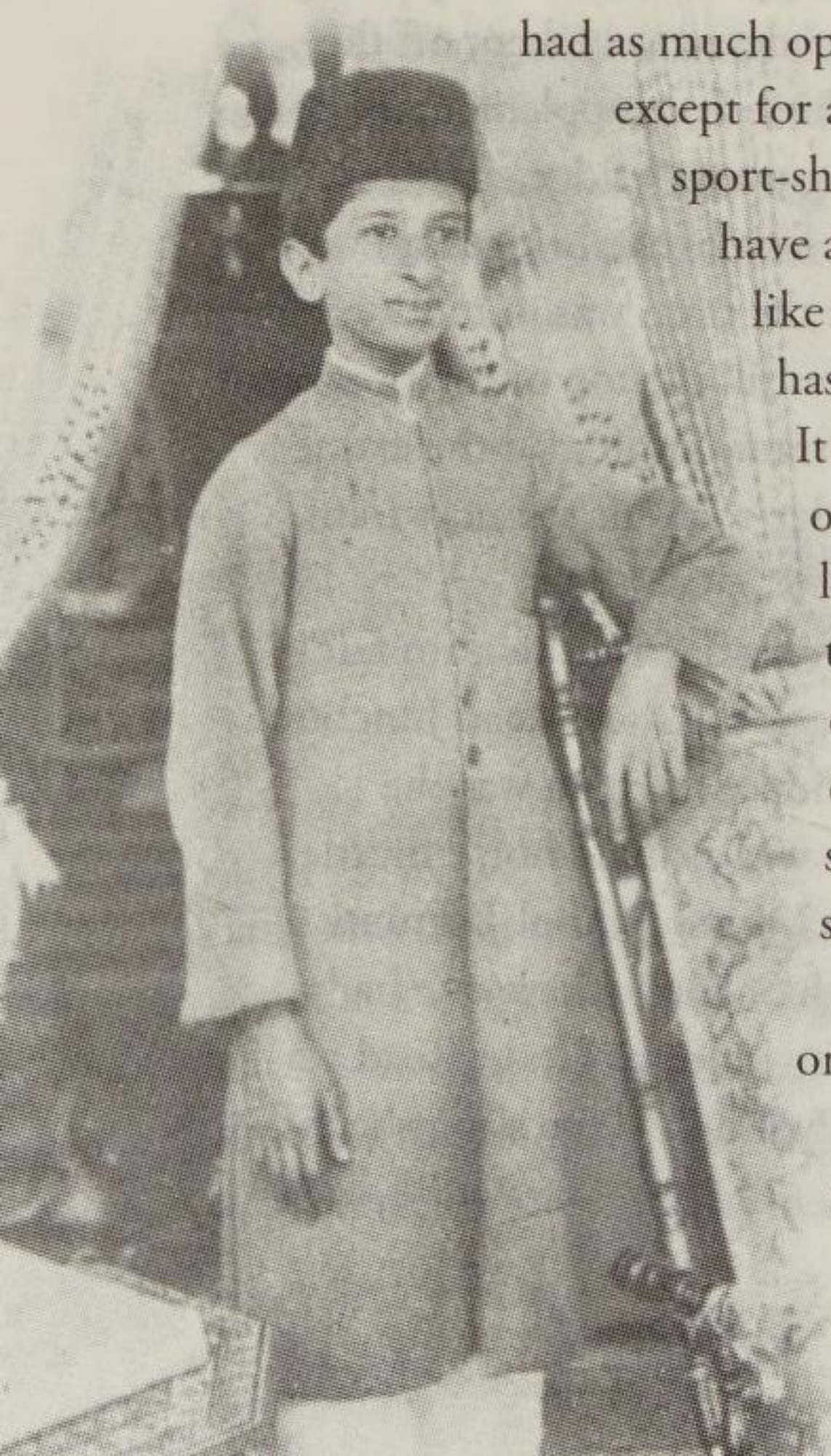
Schooldays

Till I was eight or nine I attended with two of my sisters (Akhtar and Kamoo) a mission school for girls at Girgaum with a mouthful of a name—Zanana Bible Medical Mission Girls High School (ZBMM for short), since rechristened Queen Mary's High School for Girls. Little boys were admitted but, as in my case, had to leave when they ceased

to be girls! Later my greatest joy at being entered in St Xavier's, where all my brothers have been in their time, was the prospect of being able to commute to school (at Dhobi Talao; in those days the locality was known as Money School) and back by horse tram, which held a special romance for children. There was always keen competition among us schoolboys to capture the front bench, just behind the driver, to watch the fascinating operations, and we envied the driver for all the fun we imagined he was having. Horse trams came in two sizes, drawn by a single horse—in which case it was a huge Waler imported from Australia—or by a pair of Arabs, mostly from Iraq. They were always kept in beautiful condition, the former being fitted with enormous pith topees, like the white sahibs, for protection from the tropical sun, with the ears protruding through two holes. The trams had rows of long benches of five or six seats one behind the other and facing front, each bench entered from the side. The driver stood in front of the first bench and urged the horses by tapping the metal-ferruled end of his whip, held upright in a bracket, on the wooden floor. He had a revolving brake arm (lever) regulated by a ratchet arrangement for stopping the tram while drawing in the reins. There were no fixed halts as far as I remember, but the tram slowed down or stopped whenever a passenger wanted to get on or off. Pedestrians and handcarts were kept off the track by a clanging bell under the driver's heel. For supplementary horse power required on gradients, as when going over a bridge, an extra horse with attendant was kept ready at the foot of the bridge and was skilfully hitched on by the attendant while the tram was in motion. The attendant then jumped on next to the driver till the top of the rise was reached, when he jumped off the running tram, unhitched the extra horse and led it back to the foot of the bridge to await the next tram, and so on.

I used to get 2 annas (about 12 paise) every day for the tram fare to school (Money School Terminus) and back to Grant Road Junction (Play House, locally better known as 'pila house'), which was the tramhead for our locality, Khetwadi. There was a single-horse shuttle service every fifteen minutes or so between Money School Terminus and Crawford Market, past St Xavier's High School, where one had to change to the Main Line into a two-horse tram for Grant Road via Pydhoni. Horses were usually changed at Pydhoni where a number of fresh relays were kept ready harnessed.

In my school career there is little to boast about and perhaps the less said about it the better. I was average in most subjects, somewhat above in geography and games and considerably below in maths. I was said to be good in English and sometimes had the satisfaction of having my essays read out aloud to the class by the teacher. Later in life, in 1934, I found to my astonished disbelief that I had been included in an anthology of English prose by Indian writers, selected and edited by an Englishman, E.E. Speight, Senior Professor of English at Osmania University in Hyderabad. The book, meant for supplementary reading by college students, bears the grandiose title *Indian Masters of English* and has among my 'co-masters' such distinguished names as Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu! I managed to take all the school examination hurdles as they came, but uniformly without distinction; the only school prize I ever got being for 'Good Conduct' when I was in the fourth class—prophetically enough a book entitled *Our Animal Friends*. The outdoor games I liked best were hockey, tennis and badminton, at which I was perhaps slightly above average. I also enjoyed football, and although I sometimes did play cricket I never got into the spirit of the game. However, I enjoy watching good, fast cricket in moderate doses, not a full five-day Test! I love riding but have not had as much opportunity to ride as I would have wished, except for a short period in Dehra Dun. Perhaps the sport-shooting of birds and big-game hunting have always been my No. 1 favourites, and I like to think that in these my performance has been somewhat better than average. It is not so much the killing or the size of the bag that matters with me, but the lure of the outdoor and wild places and the general atmosphere of thrill and excitement with the occasional spice of danger that makes the overall experience so enjoyable. However, to get back to school.

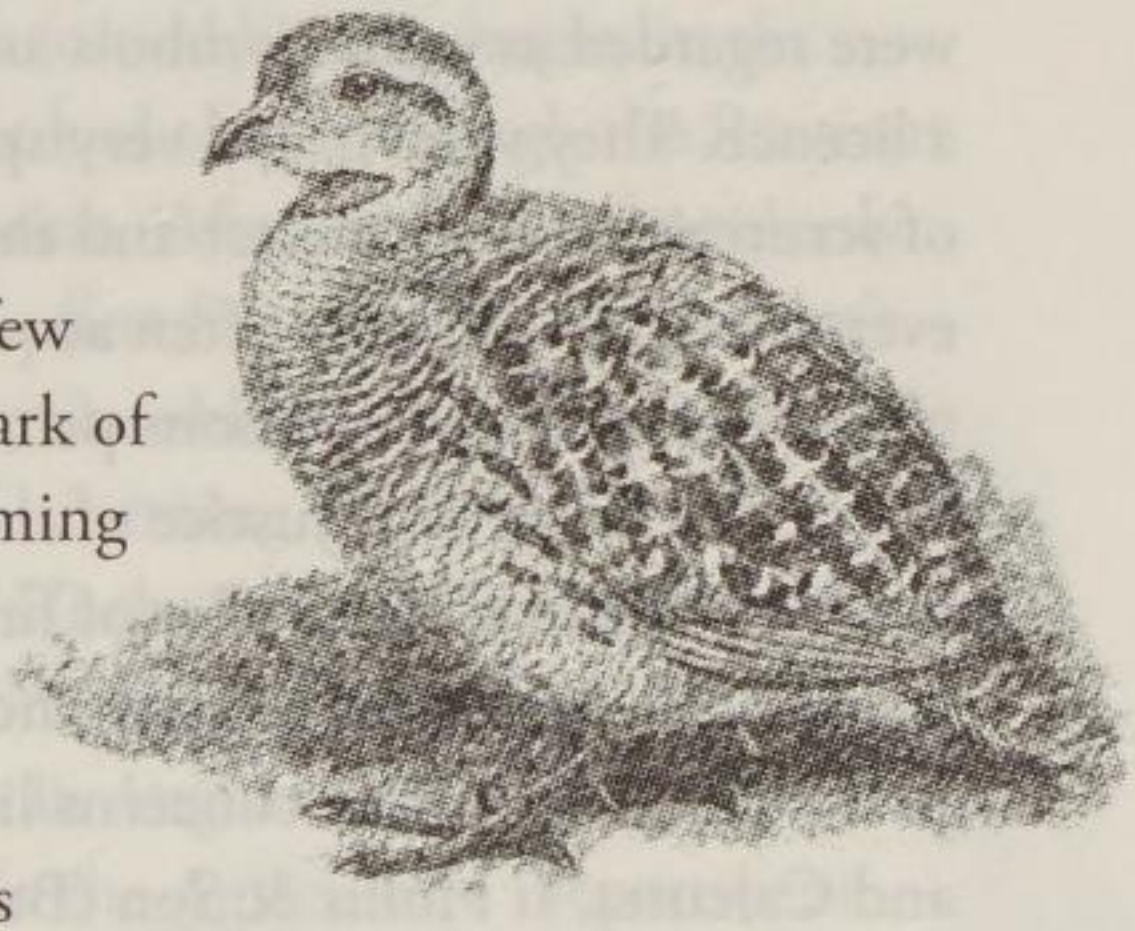


Around the time when I was thirteen or fourteen years old (1910) I suffered from

SA, *c.* 1910, in Hyderabad

chronic headaches, the cause of which was never diagnosed. But the doctors thought that a change of air might help. A half-year's break in school terms was prescribed to my undisguised delight and my brother Hamid and his wife Sharifa sportingly offered to take charge of me as the dry climate of Sind, it was thought, would be beneficial. At that time Hamidbhai was Superintendent of Land Records in Sind and head of the Tapedar (land surveyors) school in Hyderabad, an assignment that involved extensive touring throughout the province in winter. They lived in a picturesque castle-like house of sandstone on the edge of the town of Hyderabad known as Jacob Castle, for it was built by General Jacob in 1840 or thereabouts, soon after the annexation of Sind. The castle was situated on slightly raised ground, hardly a hillock, in a mud-walled compound. This compound was a thin, rambling jungle of *kandi* and *babul* trees and an ideal habitat for warblers and other small birds. Although I had seen *baya* nests when holidaying in Chembur, they were usually on tall date palms and tantalizingly out of reach. I remember my joy on finding them on low babul trees in this compound, where they could be reached and robbed without much difficulty, I being an avid egg collector in those days.

One of my vivid memories of this period is driving out one morning with Hamidbhai in his tonga for a partridge shoot at a place called Tando Hyder, a few miles out of Hyderabad, in the starry dark of an early dawn with Halley's Comet looming brilliantly overhead, and wondering if any of us would be alive when it made its next scheduled appearance in 1986. At eighty-nine 1986 still seems a long way ahead, but considering the toughness and durability of the Abdulali breed (grandfather 114, uncle 103, an aunt 100, a sister 97), I begin to suspect that this may not prove as improbable an event as it then seemed.



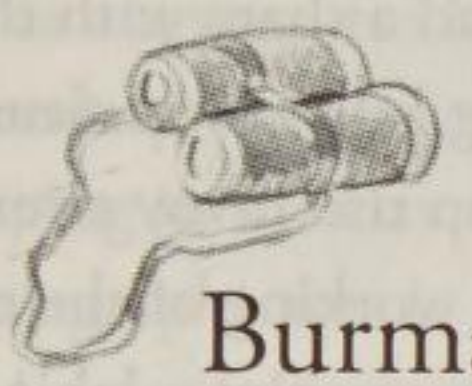
Grey Partridge

After missing one year of school because of those mysterious headaches I managed, but only just, to scrape through the matriculation examination of Bombay University in 1913, with the distinction of ranking perilously near the bottom of the list of something like 3,000 candidates who appeared that year.

But to go back a little earlier, in the years around 1908 one of my cherished ambitions was to become a big-game hunter, and a famous one if possible. Much of my reading, which admittedly was never very avid or profound, consisted of articles and books on natural history and shikar adventures such as Sanderson's *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India*, and later, Capt. A.I.R. Glasfurd's *Rifle and Romance in the Indian Jungle*, Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails*, and others by the veteran British hunters in India during the nineteenth century. 'Two or three rhinos or tigers before breakfast' seems unbelievable at the present time. This kind of remark, common in such books, gives an idea of what the forests and wildlife in those days must have been. As I have said before, we greatly hero-worshipped my uncle Amiruddin, who to us was *the* authority on Indian shikar. Most of his exploits, however, were as a guest of sporting rulers of various Indian states, conducted in royal style, and I am not sure if he ever organized any shikar trips on his own or was particularly knowledgeable about the animals he shot, or of jungle lore.

Arms licences to Indians, except to rajas, big zamindars and suchlike title-holding and proven loyalists, were very restricted. They were regarded as status symbols and there was much jockeying to get a licence. They were issued very sparingly, and only after a good deal of scrutinizing of character and the financial stability of the applicant, even though these were often acquired only for the purpose of 'display', which was one of the reasons printed on the official form, beside sport and self-defence! As a Justice of the Peace, Uncle Amir was entitled to keep any reasonable number of firearms free of licence or fee. Indian arms dealers were likewise few and restricted, the business being mostly in the hands of British concerns like Army & Navy Stores of Bombay and Calcutta, I. Hollis & Son (Bombay), R.B. Rodda & Co. and Manton & Son of Calcutta. All of these had JPs and the like on their mailing lists for catalogues of firearms and ammunition and shikar and camping requisites, such catalogues being issued every year before Christmas. I, along with some like-minded boy cousins, lay in wait for and devoured these catalogues avidly. We studied the specifications of each new gun and rifle in detail—the calibre, the muzzle velocity, the striking energy in foot/pounds, the powder of different types and weights of the various bullets, and so on, and, as a sort of window-shopping, there would be endless discussion and argument about the

superiority of this or that make or action. We had many of the vital statistics of our favourites by heart and could reel them out freely for long periods afterwards. In later years in my own case the same sort of infatuation was transferred to motorcycles and I enjoyed the exercise immensely.



Burma 1914–17

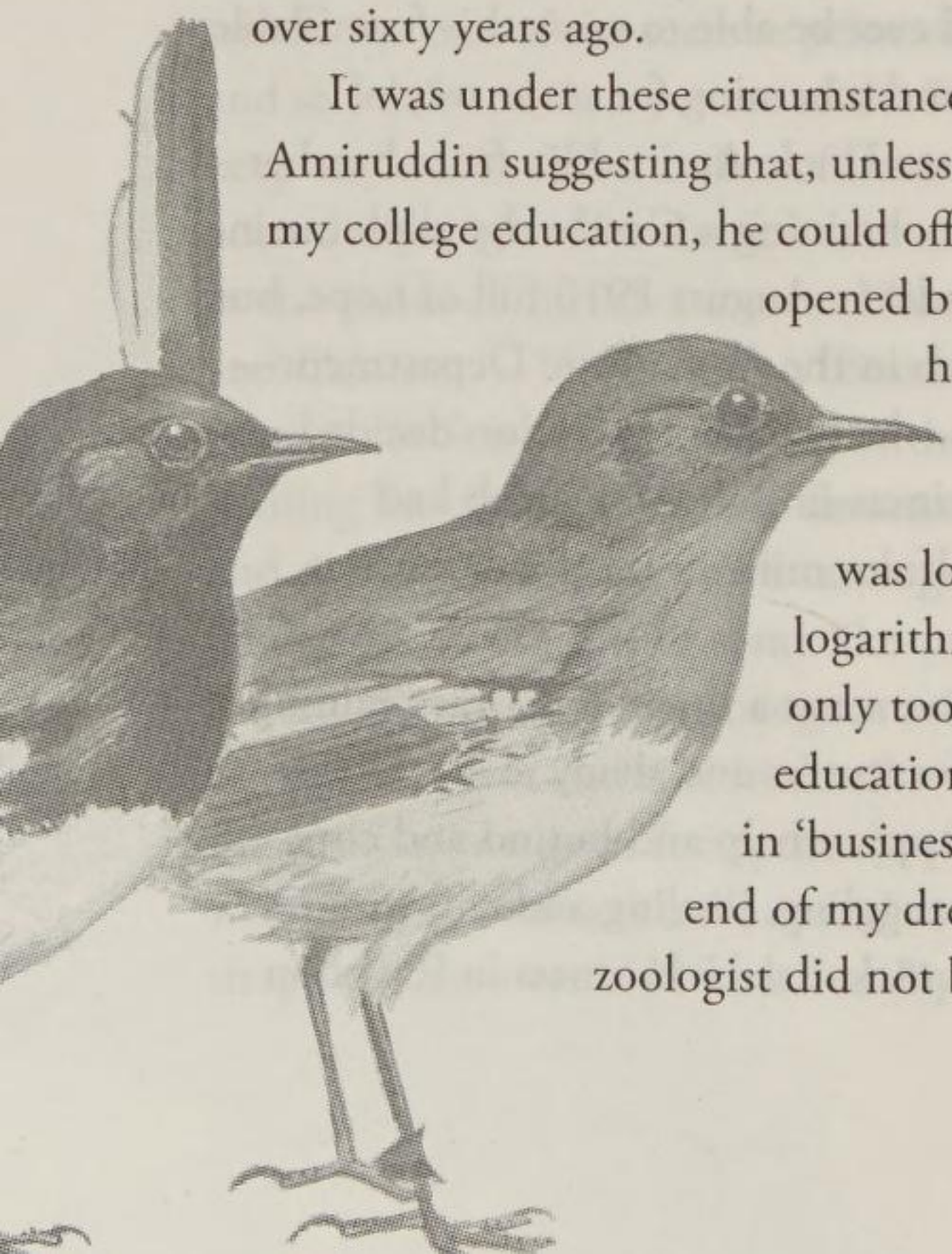
From the early bird-keeping days in Khetwadi I had dreamed of taking up zoology, particularly ornithology, as a profession when I grew up, and of becoming an intrepid explorer and big-game hunter—a respectable appellation in those days, and even somewhat of a status symbol. My reading, such as it was, consisted mostly of books about birds and general natural history, and about travel, exploration and shikar, particularly big-game hunting with all its thrills and derring-do. But in order to reach the stage at which formal biology began in the university curriculum in those days, one had to get through the Previous or First Year course following matriculation. After struggling hopelessly with logarithms and suchlike evils in the first few months at St Xavier's College it did not seem that I would ever be able to cross this formidable barrier. I was thoroughly miserable and scheming for some way of escape. Providentially, a rescue letter to Uncle Amiruddin from brother Jabir in Burma came just then. After obtaining a Cambridge diploma in Agriculture, Jabir had returned to India in August 1910 full of hope, but after trying unsuccessfully to get a job in the Agriculture Department—or some other suitable appointment—he had in desperation decided to join a cousin, Salah Tyabji, in business in Rangoon. Salah had recently acquired an interest in a wolfram mine in the Tavoy district of Tenasserim.

Tavoy had lately shot into prominence as a tin and wolfram mining centre and was attracting to itself adventurers and shady characters of the Gold Rush type. 'Mongrel, puppy, whelp and hound and curs of low degree', they were all there, struggling, jostling and elbowing, not necessarily honestly, to get rich quick. Salah's business in Rangoon

consisted chiefly of hardware and engineering stores for the flourishing rice and saw mills, and I remember his mainstay at the time was the selling agency for Burma of 'Gripoly' belting, 'leather-edged' as the advertisement boasted, which was then a popular brand. He was short-handed and had asked Jabir if he would care to come and join him in his Tavoy wolfram mining venture.

The wolfram mine in which Tyabji had a share with the concessionaire, a Burmese named Maung Lu Pe, was situated at Talaingya, a night's journey by sampan up the Tavoy river. Side by side with organizing and supervising the working of the mine, which necessitated frequent visits of several days at a time, Jabir had started a business in Tavoy town—the headquarters of the district and centre of the mining industry—in building material, mining tools and other articles in demand for the growing wolfram mining industry. The stock, consisting of sledge-hammers, picks and shovels, mining drill steel, corrugated iron, cement barrels, nails, coir ropes and suchlike dismal miscellanea, was stored and displayed on the ground floor of a house in Bazar Road near the central market, rented from one Maung E. Cho—a Burmese Muslim (Zerbadi). The landlord, with his numerous and often noisily quarrelsome family, lived above. The front part of the ground floor served as the shop, the back part as our living quarters, which included an indoor open well for the water supply. I still remember the musty smelliness of this unlovely abode quite vividly, though it is now over sixty years ago.

It was under these circumstances that Jabir had written to Uncle Amiruddin suggesting that, unless I was particularly keen to pursue my college education, he could offer me a partnership in his newly opened business if I was prepared to join him in Tavoy immediately.



Jabir's letter arrived at the psychological moment when I was looking for a strategic escape from logarithms and higher algebra, and I was only too happy to bid goodbye to college education and prepare to launch myself in 'business'. That this might also mean the end of my dream of becoming a professional zoologist did not bother me at all, at least for the

time being, so desperate had I become with college mathematics. All this happened in 1914 when I was about eighteen years old, and after I had struggled hopelessly for eight uneasy months with the university's first-year curriculum. I left for Rangoon via Calcutta in September 1914. The First World War had broken out a month before, and India had been dragged willy-nilly into it by our British masters, by illusory promises of self-government as a reward for loyalty to the King Emperor in his time of need. The legendary German cruiser *Emden* was playing chivalrous pranks with shipping in the Bay of Bengal, saving passengers and sinking ships. Wireless telegraphy was in its infancy, radio had not appeared on the scene, and radar had not even been thought of. All this added vastly to the excitement of a sea voyage to Rangoon at that period, and fresh rumours and fantastic tales erupted every day of the near-magical exploits of the *Emden*—suddenly appearing at two or three far-flung places simultaneously and miraculously vanishing after doing her fell work—bombarding coastal towns, sinking ships after gallantly saving their human cargo.

The voyage from Calcutta, which took about forty hours, was a new adventure for me. My only experience of 'sea-faring' till then had been crossing Bombay harbour by steam ferry on occasional holiday visits to Kihim, and the experience of living, eating and sleeping on board was a novelty, albeit not a particularly memorable or luxurious one since I was travelling 'European deck'.[1]

The little backwater town of Tavoy in Lower Burma was to be my domicile from 1914 to 1923, with an eventful break of some fifteen months back in Bombay (October 1917 to February 1919) which proved to be perhaps the most momentous period of my life and career. After a few days of acclimatization—or 'orientation' as is currently the more fashionable term—I sailed from Rangoon by an antiquated paddle steamship of the BISN Company—perhaps the last of its breed on this weekly Penang service to the mouth of the Tavoy river for about twenty-four hours and thence upstream about two hours, by a smaller but more modern shallow draft steam launch, the *Yengyua*. We went through a

[1] This was a space on the deck—chiefly in coastal steamers of the British India Steam Navigation Company—reserved for 'pore whites', 'eurasians' and others with western-ized habits. Its fare was cheaper than that for IInd Class passengers, slightly more than ordinary deck fare.

Tehmina, Jabir, Kamoo, SA, Saad, and Safia, 1920

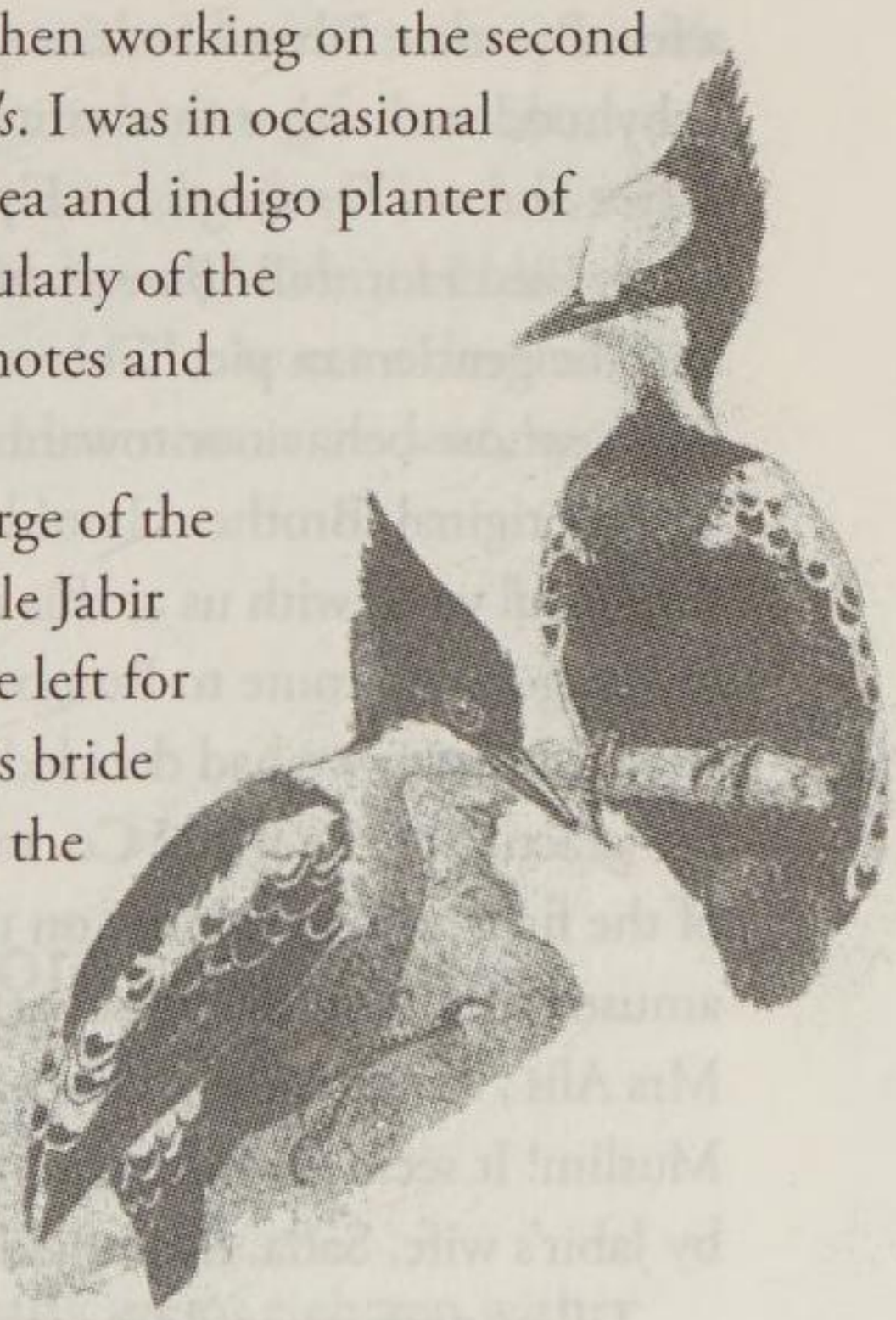
maze of muddy tidal creeks lined on both banks with mangroves, *nepa* palms and wide stretches of paddy fields beyond.

After the first few months of apprenticeship in hardware shop-keeping, learning office routine, typewriting and other tricks of the trade under brother Jabir—senior partner in our newly established firm of J.A. Ali Bros. & Co. and an extremely conscientious worker and hard taskmaster—I felt freer, especially on weekends, to move around and explore the surrounding countryside. Jabir had a handsome white pony which I frequently rode out three or four miles after the shop closed on Saturday afternoons, to various rubber estates and fruit gardens of friends where enjoyable and rewarding birding could usually be had. At that time I possessed no binoculars, but as the eyes were young and my bird-watching rather dilettante, that was not such a serious handicap. In those early greenhorn days I was even less familiar with the commoner Burmese birds than with Indian. Their identification was a knotty problem since none of the people around could help, and

the only reference book I possessed was Murray's *Birds of India*—an inept publication made more inept by the lack of proper illustrations. However, learning the hard way is fun, and, in spite of the inherent frustrations, far more satisfying and enduring in the end. The richness and diversity of the animal life, especially birds, in the forests of Tavoy district, was fascinating, much of it of course new to me, and I started making a small reference collection of my own. The abundance of woodpecker species was particularly striking, one of the first to catch my eye being the Black-and-Buff (*Meiglyptes jugularis*), so similar in 'jizz' to our Heartspotted (*Hemicircus canente*) and yet so different. The multicoloured Broadbills were also an exciting novelty. But my best remembered excitement was the first sighting of the Whitewinged Black Jay (*Platysmurus leucopterus*), quite different from anything I knew in India. It is strange how some insignificant trifles stick in one's memory: to this day I can vividly recall in minute detail the exact location, the tree, the branch and the stance in which that bird sat sixty years ago.

I had casually discovered a good Samaritan and helpful mentor in J.C. Hopwood of the then Imperial Forest Service, the Divisional Forest Officer at the time. Hopwood was very knowledgeable about Burmese birds and was himself busy collecting specimens and nests and eggs of birds of this area for Stuart Baker, then working on the second edition of the *Fauna of British India—Birds*. I was in occasional correspondence with Charles M. Inglis, a tea and indigo planter of Bihar, an authority on Indian birds, particularly of the north-east region. I frequently exchanged notes and specimens with Inglis.

In November 1915 I was left in sole charge of the Tavoy business for two or three months while Jabir was away in India getting married. Before he left for Bombay, and in preparation for receiving his bride and setting up a home, we had shifted from the dingy back part of the shop in Bazar Road to a rented single-storeyed wooden-walled and shingle-roofed house in a pleasanter locality on the fringe of the town. Although it lacked a compound and had its entrance directly from the street, it overlooked extensive paddy fields



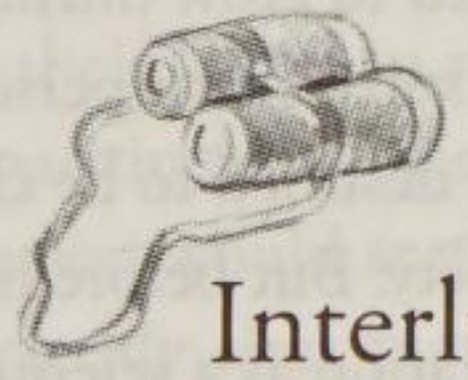
Heartspotted Woodpecker

with wooded hills on the distant horizon and was a welcome change indeed from our previous musty 'stable'. When sister-in-law Safia (née Badruddin Tyabji Sr.) came, the womanly touch soon transformed it into a snug and comfortable abode. My wife Tehmina and I continued to live happily in this place till after Jabir and his wife left Tavoy for good in 1921 to establish a branch of the hardware business in Rangoon in partnership with our would-be financier, Osman Mustikhan & Co., a well-established firm of Baluchi PWD contractors. (This step had become necessary in order to offset the declining prospects of the hardware trade in Tavoy since the slump in the mining industry.)

A couple of years after Jabir and Safia had left Tavoy to settle in Rangoon, my wife and I found and moved into a pleasant and more comfortable cottage with a large compound and some shady cashew trees, in a more 'general' locality known as the Civil Lines on the outskirts of the town. The cottage was pretty and well designed, but of a semi-pukka nature, raised off the ground on posts to fight the damp, with the walls of asbestos-cement sheets and roof wooden-shingled. Full advantage was taken by Tehmina of the opportunities here for kitchen-gardening and poultry-keeping on a domestic scale, and we were soon enjoying our own roast duck with tender home-grown green peas! We also had opportunities for raising a few Burmese Silver Pheasants from wild collected eggs, and nursing from babyhood such other interesting pets as a Leopard Cat (*Felis bengalensis*), a Tree Shrew (*Tupaia glis*), a Flying Lemur (*Galleopithecus volans*) and a Great Pied Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), in addition to the lady-dog 'Gyp' and the gentleman pie, 'General Dyer', named after the 'hero' of Jallianwala Bagh, whose behaviour towards his fellow pets was singularly evocative of the original. Brother Hamid (on furlough) and his wife Sharifa spent a delightful week with us at this cottage, and Tehmina returned with them to Rangoon en route to Bombay for good, since after the collapse of the timber venture we had decided to close down the business in Tavoy. It was the practice of the BISN Co. to announce in the Rangoon dailies the names of the first-class passengers on their mail boats to Calcutta, and I was much amused to find in the passenger list one morning a 'Mr Hamid Ali and 3 Mrs Alis', which must surely have convinced doubters that here was a true Muslim! It seems that for the voyage Sharifa and Tehmina had been joined by Jabir's wife, Safia, thus making up the covey.

Till our affairs could be wound up I moved into the Tavoy Asian Club premises, whose ownership had unsolicitedly fallen round my

neck on my clearing its hypothecation to the bank. For some time, and till finally leaving Tavoy, I was the Secretary of the Tavoy Athletic Association—actually an internationally made up football club—started by a few of us some years before. One of the most enthusiastic players in the team I had assembled was a friendly, totally untypical and eccentric ICS Englishman, F.W. Scott, the Sessions Judge of Tenasserim division at the time. He was a fanatical self-appointed guardian of the football field against encroaching pedestrians, mostly milk vendors short-cutting across the turf who were liable to be furiously chased and manhandled by Scott if caught. One morning, before the court sitting, he rushed almost breathless into my living room to inquire the cost of ten seers of milk. In spite of being familiar with his eccentricities I couldn't make out what this was all about. It seems that, driving past the football ground on his way to work, Scott had seen a milkman taking a short-cut through the field with a pail in his hand. He had stopped the car suddenly, jumped out and given chase. The man had dropped his bucket in terror and fled for his life, whereupon Scott had emptied the milk on the ground; he now wanted to compensate the man! Another time, on his way home after the court had risen, Scott barged into my room looking pale, nervous and thoroughly miserable, and flopped into an easy chair to relax. He was almost shivering with emotion and explained that he had just sentenced a Burmese dacoit to be hung for murder. Before being taken away by the police the man was asked if he had any last wish to make. The murderer, who seemed completely unshaken by the sentence, replied quite coolly that he would like to eat a durian! The contrast in the reactions of the sentencer and sentencee, he said, was a revealing commentary on human nature.



Interlude at Bombay and Marriage

Having thrust myself into business at the early age of eighteen with my formal education incomplete and without any sort of training or

natural aptitude for the job, I began to realize after a couple of years how unsatisfactory the situation was. My home leave was due towards the end of 1917 and in consultation with the Senior it was decided that I should prolong my leave in Bombay to undergo a year's formal course in Commercial Law and Accountancy at Davar's College of Commerce. This decision proved an indirect blessing in disguise, because with the considerate goading and encouragement of Reverend Father Blatter, Director of the Biology Department at St Xavier's College, who had soon discovered where my true interest lay, I was able in the same year to complete the B.Sc. (in those days B.A. Honours) course in Zoology under the stimulating tutelage of Professor Jal P. Mullan—a remarkable man and admirable teacher who remained a valued friend till his death in about 1953.

The daily schedule of attendance at Davar's was from eight to ten o'clock in the morning, which left just enough time to pick up Stanley Prater from his miniature terrace flat at Elphinstone Circle on the pillion of my little Douglas and dash off to St Xavier's before the zoology class began. Prater, an Anglo-Indian, had joined the BNHS as a callow youth just out of school as a 'bottlewasher' ten years or so before, and had shown great promise during his apprenticeship as museum assistant and field collector under the Society's first stipendiary curator, N.B. Kinnear.

Stanley H. Prater

I had corresponded with Prater fairly regularly from Tavoy on natural history matters, chiefly birds, in course of time spilling over to other matters of wide common interest. Close friendship and understanding had developed between us, which continued to grow during the many years of subsequent personal contact we were destined to be colleagues in the Society. But before his claim for consideration as a scientific member of the staff could be entertained, the Society's Executive Committee had required him to undergo a formal course in biology under Father Blatter.

My admiration and regard for Prater's intellectual versatility was profound. Though perhaps he cannot claim any *original* contribution to science, he read voraciously and managed to keep himself abreast of all the latest developments in natural history. Apart from possessing a remarkably retentive memory, he had a gift for digesting complicated technicalities and reducing pedantic professional jargon into simple language a layman could understand. Indeed this was Prater's forte—the popularization of zoological knowledge. Most of his writings bear witness to his mastery of the art. He wrote in a pleasing and often humorous style. For our zoology practicals at St Xavier's we had to work in pairs, and I well remember how convenient it was for me to use him as the working partner whenever unsavoury jobs, such as dissecting a cockroach, had to be performed.

After the zoology class at St Xavier's we would rush back to the Society's rooms, which in those days and up to 1953 were in the premises of Phipson & Co., Wine Merchants. I spent many hours several times a week in the library or rummaging among the bird collection to familiarize myself with Indian birds and in trying to identify with the help of Prater or Kinnear some of the species that had puzzled me in Tenasserim.

I lived with my eldest sister Ashraf-unnissa—Ashraf for short—and brother-in-law Shums, the shikari-solicitor, in their Khetwadi flat above the stable, the venue of my boyhood sparrow hunts. This was an annexe of the old Amir Manzil belonging to uncle Amiruddin Tyabji who had died in February 1917 while I was till in Burma, after which the property was dismembered and sold. Unbeknown to me, Ashraf and my younger sister Kamoo had, in secret collusion, been scheming, like all loving sisters, to get me engaged to an attractive relation who had taken their fancy and evidently charmed them off their feet. In their letters to me in Tavoy, and in personal conversation later, this apparition was being subtly brought in somewhat oftener than the occasion would seem to demand, though I thought I had made it sufficiently clear that at that point of time I was not interested in women at all. Tehmina and I, it seems, had been together as kindergarten pupils in the ZBMM Girls High School at Girgaum in 1904 or 1905, before her father, C.A. Latif, migrated to London with his family to extend his pearl business to Europe. I did not remember the little girl at all till shown an ancient group photograph of the

school, years later. After passing her London matric from a somewhat élite boarding school in Surrey, Tehmina was discouraged by her father from continuing at a university, and instead she was entered into a Finishing School for young ladies to learn the correct socialite airs and graces. Tehmina often described with much amusement the inanity of some of the tenets of genteel behaviour taught there. For example, one which I remember was that before you stirred a pot of weak tea at a party you had always to say 'excuse me' to the company with a sweetly apologetic smile. The Latif family repatriated itself to India in 1915, as the First World War was hotting up over London and there seemed little likelihood of an early end, and settled in an elegant rented flat in Adenwala Mansion at Chowpati, before their own building, 'Latifia', just across the way in Harvey Road, was completed. My sisters artfully contrived a supposedly impromptu meeting between us at this flat, and in due course the train of events followed according to their plan. At first I was rather nervous as to how a girl brought up and educated abroad in an entirely different milieu and used to the sophisticated amenities of life would respond to the prospect of a rough-and-ready existence in a backwater like Tavoy, with its primitive conditions and practically no entertainments or social life.

Kamoo and Tehmina had taken to each other from their very first meeting after the latter's return from Britain, and remained the closest of friends even after Kamoo's marriage to cousin Hassan F. Ali in 1918 and their departure to settle in Japan, right up to Tehmina's death in July 1939. It was evident that Kamoo had started the preparatory softening process well in advance of my coming from Burma, because Tehmina seemed to know a great many things about me that I would not otherwise have expected. On closer acquaintance with Tehmina I was relieved to find that her tastes and interests and likes and dislikes were almost identical with my own. Despite her sophisticated upbringing and background she remained a country girl at heart. Luckily the finishing school had not finished her completely. Like me she was ever happy to escape boring social parties, specially of society ladies and small talk. She liked informal friendly company in small doses and people of kindred interests and outlook. Tehmina also despised hypocrisy, cant, and pomposity, and could stomach no ostentation. She loved the wooded countryside and jungle walks, good books and poetry, both Urdu and English, and flowers and gardening, and later, during my

ornithological surveys, she became seriously interested in birds. In short, most of our interests overlapped as much as one could wish, a discovery that gave me a little more confidence about the future.

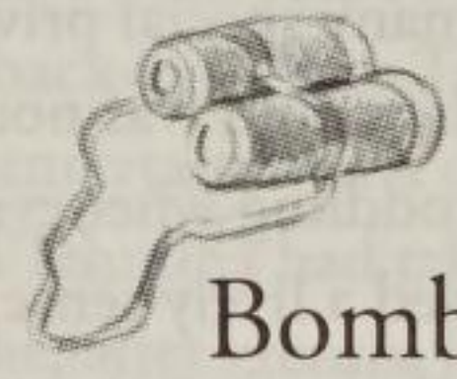
It was lucky for me much as for Tehmina herself that, thanks to her lively temperament and friendly disposition, she was so well loved by all my sisters and brothers and got on so well with the family. Kamoo and Farhat were her special favourites, and I feel she was never so relaxed and happy as when living in their company. Farhat, my second-oldest sister, who in turn had grown particularly fond of Tehmina, was two years younger than Ashraf, and the fourth in the family series. She had finished with her elementary English education at the ZBMM Girls School long before I joined, and thereafter had shared with aunt Hamida Begam some of the housework and responsibilities of the Khetwadi establishment, as well as her care for the developing family brood. Farhat was in fact a surrogate mother to me: she gave me my first lessons in Urdu as a child, and remained in many ways my favourite sister till her end in 1982. Being the 'baby' of the family I could wheedle many special privileges and concessions denied to the older children, and was not slow to take undue advantage of her indulgent mollycoddling whenever possible. She was gentle and cheerful by nature, possessed a lively sense of humour, and, like Hamid, had an amazing knack of creating enduring friendships at all levels, which made her remembered even by casual acquaintances ever after. In 1911 she married Shuja-ud-din (Shujoobhai to us), a younger brother of Shums, the shikari-solicitor, who was the eldest son of uncle Abbas (Tyabji).[1]

Harking back to the time I got engaged to Tehmina, I am reminded of that telegram which, by the perfection of its mutilation, was for me more embarrassing than funny under the particular circumstances. Many may recall the murderous epidemic of influenza that swept across the continents in 1918 and carried off in a few short weeks many times more lives than the total killed in the four years of the First World War immediately preceding it. I happened to be in Bombay then, doing my training in commerce and zoology. Tehmina's elder brother, Hassan Latif, was a district engineer in the Nizam's service, and news came through that

[1] Three of uncle Abbas's sons married three of my sisters, thus almost cornering the market, as it were: Shums–Ashraf, Shuja–Farhat, and Salah–Akhtar.

his entire household, including his wife, several children and servants, were down with the fever with none at home to attend to them. Being newly engaged to the sister in the face of a mild domestic reservation and anxious to cut a dash with the family, I gallantly offered to go to Hyderabad and help with the nursing. No wonder Hassan felt somewhat alarmed, on receiving the telegram, at my beginning to scrounge on in-laws-to-be so early in the day! Actually the telegram which had left me as SHALL I COME AND HELP had read on arrival at its destination as SMALL INCOME SEND HELP. This is the most perfect example of telegraphic mutilation I know of and deserves to be immortalized.

We got married in December 1918. Though I was only twenty-two at the time and perhaps rather young to marry, I was persuaded to do so since there was no knowing how soon I would be able to return to India next. In the event it proved just as well I didn't put it off, because economic conditions for our business worsened steadily with the end of the war and would have remained impossible for me until many years later.

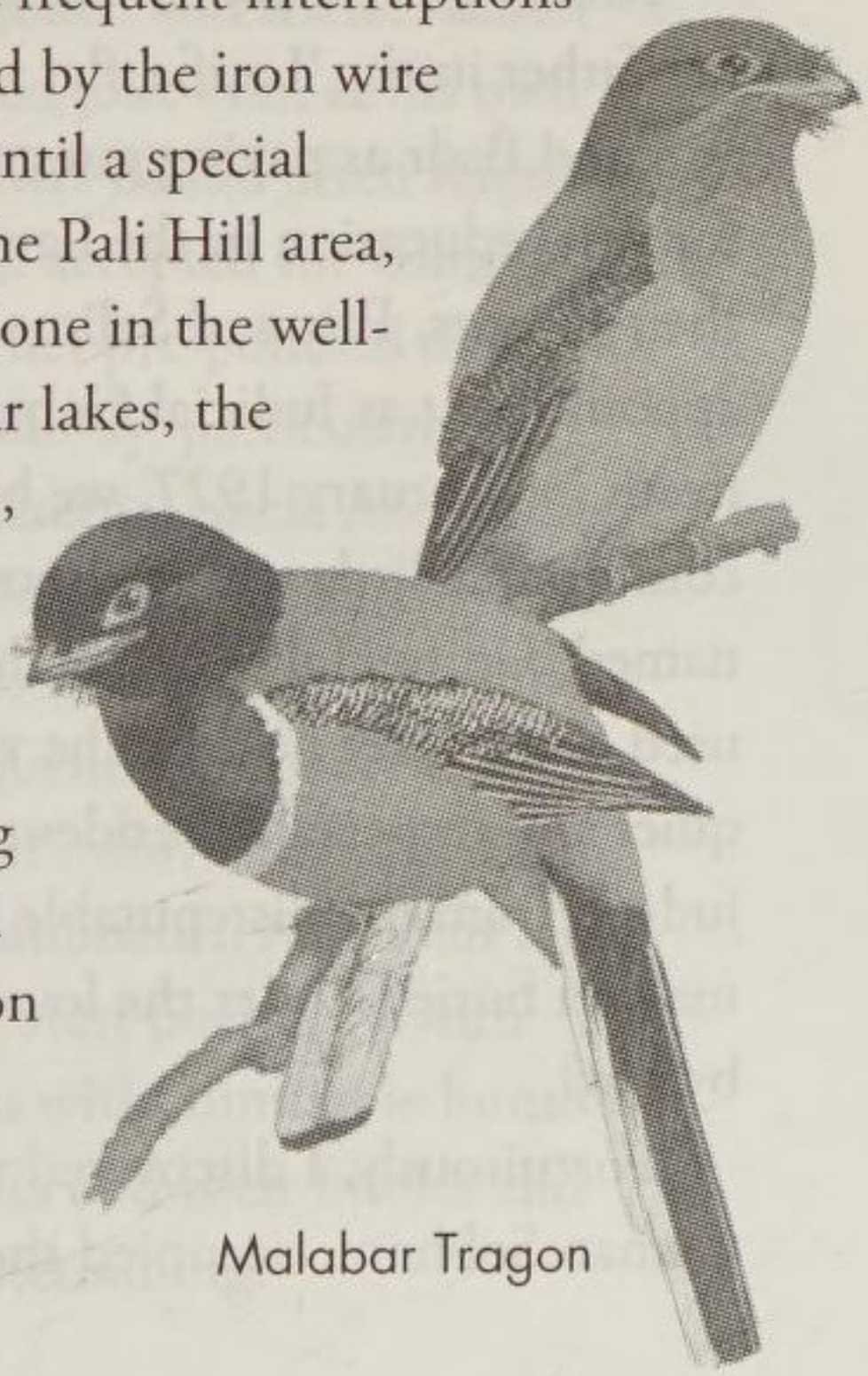


Bombay 1924–9

On retreat from Burma in 1924, Tehmina and I lived for a while with my sister Kamoo and brother-in-law Hassan, who had kindly offered to let us be nominal paying guests in their spacious, newly built bungalow on Pali Hill in Bombay. Pali Hill and the area around its base, from the fishing village of Danda eastward—Khar, Vile Parle, Santa Cruz, etc. and south to Bandra—were paddy fields interspersed with large mango and tamarind trees and palmyra (*Borassus*) palms. Most of Pali Hill, including the golf links up to Danda, was the private property of Mulraj Khattu. It was an extensive grove of grafted mango trees, mostly alphonso and *pairi*. Plots were sold for residential bungalows chiefly, and preferably to Europeans, and on the whole the locality was more or less an exclusively European preserve. The bungalows were of attractive single-storeyed, colonial-type architecture, with tiled roofs, and mostly surrounded by well-kept lawns and flower beds. In fact there was a municipal ruling up to the time of Independence and later

that two-thirds of every plot was to be maintained as open space and only one-third could be built upon. At that time there were no pukka roads, no electricity, no municipal sanitation, and only a restricted and undependable water supply. The most important landmark of the locality was the Petit Parsi Orphanage—now the Avabai Petit Girls High School. Happily, the place had not then been discovered by movie stars.

The hill slope from the golf links and up Carter Road, from where the bottom paddy fields and golf links ended, was well wooded—shrubbery of *karwanda, ber,* babul and wild date, with large shady trees of *imli* (tamarind), banyan and others characteristic of the South Konkan landscape. It was an excellent venue for birding and it was while living on Pali Hill in 1924 that I did most of the collecting and study for a paper I hoped to produce, titled 'Birds of Bombay and Salsette', as a pendant to Prater's very useful *Snakes of Bombay and Salsette*, which had recently been published by the Society. The paper on birds was actually published in the Society's journal many years later, jointly with Humayun Abdulali, who had also gathered a lot of additional material while doing zoology at St Xavier's College for his B.A. degree, with encouragement from Father Palacios, a Spanish Jesuit who was then Director of Biology in the College. Commuting to office between Bandra and Churchgate was done by steam-engined trains. Cars were few and the roads dusty and untarred. The first local electric trains started at about this time. There were frequent interruptions and stoppages due to short-circuiting caused by the iron wire in crows' nests built in overhead brackets, until a special crow-proof bracket was designed. Besides the Pali Hill area, most of my bird collecting in Salsette was done in the well-wooded areas around Powai, Tulsi and Vihar lakes, the Trombay hills, Mulund, Vikhroli, Bhandup, Ghodbunder, Bhyndar, etc. On Sundays and holidays, Prater, McCann and Jacobs (Secretary of the Prince of Wales Museum) often took part in these collecting forays and many unexpected species figured in the collection, such as the Malabar Trogon and the Three-toed Forest Kingfisher—two that I remember vividly. The Mulund hills backdropping the present Godrej complex



Malabar Tragon

at Vikhroli were densely forested and the entire catchment area of the lakes and all that is now Aarey Milk Colony and Borivli National Park was one continuous stretch of fairly thick jungle and palmyra palms. Pig and barking deer were common, and also sambar. Panthers frequently strayed in, and the last stray tiger was shot in 1929 near Vihar Lake.

After Kamoo and the children left for Japan and the Pali bungalow was let, we moved over to Tehmina's father, C.A. Latif, in the top flat of his apartment building, 'Latifia', on Harvey Road behind Wilson College at Chowpati. Tehmina soon got a part-time job as Secretary of the Bombay Presidency Women's Council with its office in the south wing of the Town Hall. A post of ornithologist was advertised by the Zoological Survey of India at that time, for which I applied with Father Blatter, Dr Stresemann and the BNHS as my referees, but, having no university degree, stood little chance against M.Sc.s and Ph.D.s. This post actually went to M.L. Roonwal, who retired in 1965 as Director of the Zoological Survey of India, having succeeded Sundar Lal Hora. I felt greatly dejected at the time because it seemed unlikely that there would soon be another opening for an ornithologist elsewhere in India. My advice to all young aspirants for government jobs is: never fail to arm yourself with a university degree, for whatever it is worth. However, in retrospect I feel it was the luckiest thing that could have happened to me as it saved me from ending up as a fossilized bureaucrat.

After I got the job at the BNHS, Tehmina and I continued to live with her father in the 'Latifia' flat at Chowpati. The annexe was occupied by Saif and Badr as paying guests. They had been left behind in Bombay for their education in the Law College and St Xavier's respectively, while their parents, Faiz and Salima Tyabji, had moved to Karachi on his appointment as Judicial Commissioner in Sind. After my father-in-law's death in February 1927, we had to shift for ourselves and moved into a comfortable little two-bedroom flat in a very well maintained building named 'Unity Hall' in Rebsch Street, Byculla, overlooking the maidan used as a cricket field by the YMCA two buildings away. It was a pleasant, quiet and respectable residential locality in those days, and must not be judged from the disreputable shabby slum it has become today, with the maidan buried under the lower-middle-class *chawls* crowding cheek by jowl.

Fortuitously, I discovered that a class friend from my schooldays, Osman Sobhani, occupied the top floor of this three-storey building.

Though less directly involved in the Khilafat and Non-Co-operation Movements than his elder brother Umar, Osman was still very close to the inner circle of political big guns like Maulana Shaukat Ali, Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Shuaib Qureshi and others of the day, many of whom used to visit him frequently at his elegant, tastefully appointed bachelor's apartment. We could not help soon getting sucked into the political vortex, but managed to cling only to the outer fringe because both Tehmina and I had some very dear friends in the 'opposition', both Indian and British, with whom we were anxious to maintain our friendship. Also, I did not want to be sidetracked from my main interest—natural history and birds.

Thus we managed to get the best of both worlds, such as they were. Mrs Naidu used to live in the Taj Hotel in Bombay during those days of high political drama so as to be on tap for the frequent snap meetings of the Congress Working Committee, of which she was President at the time if I remember rightly, or, in any case, a very close associate and confidante of Gandhiji. With her remarkable intellect and sense of humour—sorely lacking in politicians as a species then as now—she always managed to pour oil on troubled waters and restore calm among the factions. Mrs Naidu was not only gifted with a delightful sense of humour but was one of those rare politicians who can laugh at themselves and are not obsessed by their own importance. She was perhaps the only one of the inner circle who joked and traded banter with Gandhiji, who could himself enjoy a good joke even at his own expense. Among informal friendly company Mrs Naidu often referred to the Mahatma as Mickey Mouse, and Gandhiji accepted the compliment with lighthearted toothless gaiety. Even from her pre-political days Mrs Naidu had close friendly ties with the Tyabji family, particularly the Baroda branch, of which the patriarch, my maternal uncle Abbas, later became her comrade-in-arms during the Bardoli and Salt Satyagrahas. On one of her visits to Osman, Mrs Naidu discovered that Tehmina and I lived below him, and thereafter she frequently dropped in at our flat on her way up or down with delightful informality and much mutual pleasure. She was a delightful conversationalist, raconteur and mimic, and regaled us with recitations of her latest poems, or with current and past anecdotes and remembrances with inimitable humour. Her assessments of her political contemporaries and their foibles and eccentricities were particularly incisive and entertaining.

It was on one of these impromptu visits that she brought in with her and introduced us to a panting Maulana Shaukat Ali, the leader of the Khilafat Movement in Bombay, and his co-worker, the handsome and lovable Shuaib Qureshi, who soon became a close friend and constant visitor to our flat. He had a deep, sonorous voice, and often entertained us with his chanting of many of the moving, patriotic and pro-Islamic verses of Iqbal, of whom he was an ardent admirer, both as a poet and as a champion of Islamism. One of his recitations, the beauty and sonorousness of which still rings in my ears, is the touching *shikwa* (panegyric) of the vicissitudes of the island of Sicily, once an important Muslim stronghold in Europe. Shuaib was an ardent Turkophile and hero-worshipper of Enver Pasha. He had been a volunteer with Dr M.A. Ansari's medical mission to the Turks in their war in the Balkans (1912) and won high praise for his courage in rescuing the wounded from the battlefield under fire.

One of the first things we did on shifting to a flat of our own, after my father-in-law's death, was to purchase a small car. It was a seven horse-power Baby Austin, the collapsible canvas-top model with wire-ribbed (cycle) wheels. It cost Rs 1,700 brand new, shock absorbers and screen wiper extra. It did forty-five miles to the gallon when the price of petrol, thanks to cut-throat competition between the two main oil companies, Burma Oil and Shell, was 11 annas per gallon. Roadside pumps were few and far between, and petrol was available mostly in

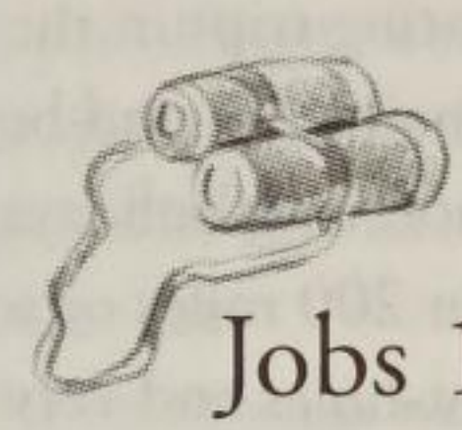
Bullocks extricating 'Jane' from difficulties, October 1927

two-gallon cans—green for BOC and red for Shell. An entry in a tattered pocket notebook of the time reminds me that petrol for a shikar trip to Lonand, beyond Poona, and back to Bombay, 300 miles plus, cost Rs 13 and 8 annas.

We usually drove to the Fort together and I dropped Tehmina at her office (Women's Council) in the south wing of the Town Hall on my way to the Prince of Wales Museum. 'Jane' (as the car was named by Tehmina after one of her favourite authors, Jane Austen) was driven up parallel sloping planks and parked for the day on the raised open verandah outside the then Natural History Gallery. The little car provided great fun on Sundays and holidays for picnics and for bird-collecting or small-game shooting trips in the Bombay neighbourhood—in Salsette, and on the mainland, and beyond. It also provided thoroughly enjoyable leisurely motoring holidays to Poona, Aurangabad, Nasik and other places within 200 miles or so of Bombay. The roads were untarred, usually full of pot-holes and very dusty, which inhibited venturing further afield. With such a lightweight car one had to pick one's way slowly and carefully and there was the constant nuisance of trucks and heavier vehicles overtaking and covering one in a pall of dust. Many of the rivers and nullahs were unbridged and impassable for the little car during the monsoon. I remember our once getting badly stuck in the sandy bed of the unbridged Bhima river on the main Poona–Aurangabad road, the engine stalling mid-stream when half under water and being dragged out quite casually, without any apparent effort, by a supercilious pair of bullocks being led back to the village after the day's ploughing! The lightness of the car had another great advantage: if it ran out of petrol in the city it could easily be perambulated single-handedly to the nearest filling station or depot.

From a little beyond Poona, and up to Sholapur and beyond, blackbuck were plentiful and hardly ever out of sight on both sides of the road, constantly crossing and recrossing in front of the car. One could stop almost anywhere and do a short cross-country stalk of a shootable trophy. No shooting licence was necessary and it was normal practice for weekend 'sportsmen' to 'rail off' extra animals killed to any one of the bigger hotels in Bombay, for instance the Taj, without previous intimation, way-billed by the railways as 'Dead deer' and 'Freight to pay'. The hotels gladly took delivery and paid the sender Rs 5 per animal with thanks. During the open shooting season several

such consignments, even from so-called bona fide sportsmen, reached the various hotels every day, and venison was freely advertised on the menu. In such black-cotton-soil country the antelopes were highly vulnerable in the monsoon, when the heavy clay hampered speedy escape and professional hunters took full advantage of their helplessness. Small wonder that this sort of commercialized slaughter, aided and abetted by four-wheel-drive jeeps, powerful spotlights, the free issue of firearms ('crop protection') and relaxed law-and-order conditions after the Second World War, especially since Independence, have completely wiped out blackbuck from this area.



Jobs 1923–9 and Germany 1929–30

While unsuccessfully job-hunting and marking time for some congenial natural history assignment, I was accommodated by kindly cousins with a temporary clerical position in their cotton exporting firm of N. Futehally & Co., where I arrogated to myself the grandiose designation of 'Extra-assistant sub-deputy head clerk, *pro tem*'. The salary, euphemistically called 'allowance', commenced with Rs 150 per month, but soon backslid to Rs 100 when the firm sustained a serious financial reverse in Japan through the failure of an important textile-mill client.

At this time I was offered a business job by another relation who was then opening a branch office in Aden. It sounded attractive enough financially in my state of joblessness, but I am happy to have resisted the temptation and declined, because from the antecedents and clever practices of this sanctimonious and highly successful businessman I would doubtless have been expected to do similar clever things that, squeamishly enough, I would not have enjoyed.

As luck would have it, after a protracted palaver the BNHS had just succeeded in persuading the Government of Bombay to budget the appointment of a Guide Lecturer in the newly opened Natural History

Section of the Prince of Wales Museum. Reverend Father Blatter happened to be Chairman of the selection committee for the post and supported my candidature strongly. My being appointed was largely due to him and to Prater, the Curator, under whom the Guide Lecturer would have to work. Fate had decreed that the selection committee should hold its meeting during the fortnight in which my brother-in-law Shums and I had planned a shooting holiday in the Utnoor forests of Adilabad district of Hyderabad State, then some of the finest tiger country in the peninsula. With great disappointment I had to back out of this venture (ill-fated as it later proved) since I was a candidate for the post. A few days after I had begun work in my new appointment, the very sad news came that Shums had been fatally mauled by a tiger that he had wounded and was following up without sufficient caution. His plucky young companion, Azeem, who had beaten off the animal, was also badly clawed and bitten, but was fortunate enough to be removed in time to better medical care in Bombay, where he recovered after weeks of grave anxiety.

Planning the syllabus and organizing the work of the new Nature Study Department was enjoyable. In the comparatively short life of the scheme I think a marked increase of intelligent interest in natural history in pupils and teachers of the participating schools, and in the Museum Natural History section's popularity with the general public, was clearly discernible. To begin with only a few secondary and high schools were selected, which sent classes by appointment and in rotation for simple, informal talks on animal life, illustrated with lantern slides, models and museum specimens. I particularly enjoyed talking to pupils from the School for the Blind, because of the lively interest they showed, and I never ceased to marvel at their almost magical aptitude for grasping anatomical details merely by passing their fingers over the exhibits of skulls and bones specially prepared for them. The usefulness and success of the Society's Nature Education Scheme was so gratifying that it seemed sacrilegious of the Bombay Government to have discontinued it after only a three-years' run on the dubious pretext, considering the paltry expenditure involved, of financial stringency. Thus, as soon as possible after Independence, during the sympathetic Chief Ministership of Bombay State of the friendly B.G. Kher, Prater and I as Curator and Honorary Secretary of the Society respectively, pressed for and succeeded in getting the Nature Study Scheme resuscitated, with M.R. Raut as

its organizer. With a widening of its scope and activities it has been functioning satisfactorily since about 1949 and is no doubt responsible, at least in part, for the noticeable increase of awareness and interest in wildlife and nature conservation among the youth and general public of Maharashtra in recent years.

However, two years of guide-lecturing were enough for me. I realized that my real métier was birds and decided to undergo a course of training in systematic and field ornithology before settling down to it, hopefully as a whole-time occupation. As to how I would keep the wolf from the door thereafter did not worry me then. Ornithology has always been the Cinderella of Indian Zoology and there was no university or institution in the country where such training could be had. I had therefore written to the British Museum (Natural History) and to the Berlin University Zoological Museum to ask what facilities were available there. The political atmosphere between India and Britain at that period, 1929—when, according to a scandalized Churchill, a half-naked fakir had the temerity to parley on equal terms with the representative of His Majesty the King Emperor—was charged with so much bias and bitterness that, as was apparent from the discouragingly lukewarm response I got from the British Museum, conditions of work in Britain would have been uncongenial. On the other hand, although I was not personally known to Professor Erwin Stresemann till then, his response was so cordial and welcoming that I immediately decided to go to Berlin.

My guru—Professor Erwin Stresemann. Heligoland, October 1929

There is no doubt that Berlin proved for me the luckiest turning at the crossroads of my ornithological career. Considering that I was only an unknown and aspiring ornithologist at that time, and an entire stranger to him personally, the warmth of Stresemann's welcome and the painstaking co-operation and guidance he gave me from the first day—and throughout the entire

period I was privileged to work with him—were heart-warming. His simplicity and modesty, his unassuming erudition, his lively, almost boyish humour, and the vastness of his scientific knowledge have left in me a vivid impression and admiration for the man, the scientist, the mentor and the friend that has endured and grown with the years. I considered him my guru to the end. Appeals to him for advice and assistance in knotty problems of taxonomy, ecology or zoogeography never failed to elicit prompt and detailed replies, all scribbled by hand, the lines often running diagonally across a sheet and none too easy to decipher until the code was broken, yet meticulously reasoned, documented and free from all ambiguity. Considering that I was only one of his numerous worldwide protégés, it is a standing wonder to me how Stresemann ever managed to keep abreast with his correspondence and up-to-date with the increasing spate of scientific literature, and at the same time still found time to continue his own research and discharge the other responsibilities inherent in his acknowledged position as the doyen of world ornithologists.

Kinnear, who had himself been one of the people who, as Curator of the BNHS, had helped to kindle my youthful interest in birds in earlier years, seemed a changed personality in the vitiated Indo–British atmosphere of the Gandhian era, and in the aura of the British Museum. In August 1929 one of the prominent Indians we found settled in Berlin since before and all through the First World War was Champakraman Pillay, a 'fugitive' member of the revolutionary group which called itself the Provisional Government of India and had some sort of recognition from the Kaiser. Its President was a curious simpleton, though a completely serious and dedicated visionary, Raja Mahendra Pratap, a dispossessed *taluqdar* of UP. After the defeat of Germany both had a price put on their heads by the British Indian government and so found it more prudent to continue living in Germany. Pillay, we discovered, was an excellent cook and gave us delicious Indian meals from time to time prepared from ersatz masalas.

It was while working at the Zoological Museum of Berlin University that I first made the acquaintance of Bernhard Rensch, a brilliant young zoologist who had been making methodical collections of birds and other animal groups in the Sunda Islands. His special studies were about the problems of geographical variation produced by climatic factors in the context of the origin of species and evolution. He had been newly appointed

Lesser Kestrel

on the museum staff in the Department of Malacology (the science of molluscs), another field of his specialization, for lack of an immediate vacancy in ornithology. Bernhard and I took to each other immediately, as did Tehmina to Bernhard's friendly and charming wife, Ilse. They have been among my closest foreign friends through the intervening years of peace and war.

In the bird room of the museum I also had my first meeting with Ernst Mayr, another brilliant and upcoming young protégé of Stresemann who had just returned from a major bird-collecting expedition in the New Guinea region, and whom I met again in the USA only after the Second World War. Ernst Mayr is currently Emeritus Professor of Zoology at Harvard University and indisputably among the topmost biologists of the world today. Unfortunately—in marked contrast to his mentor Stresemann's unassuming modesty—Mayr makes you feel he is not unaware of the fact.

Here I also had the pleasure and privilege of meeting for the first time (and thereafter frequently at the Berlin Zoo and Aquarium, of which he was the Director) the jolly and indefatigable biologist Oskar Heinroth and his remarkable wife, Magdalena, dedicated pioneers of the modern scientific cult of bird behaviour study. They helped to provide a direction and strong ecological bias to my subsequent work on Indian birds, which has drawn complimentary comment from reviewers.

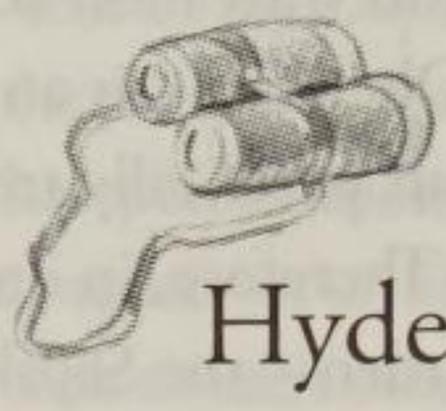
The working out under Stresemann's guidance of the collection of Burmese birds I had brought from Bombay gave me a good idea of the techniques and procedures of taxonomical work and also of the pitfalls with which they are beset, including the danger of hasty conclusions based on slender 'eye of faith' premises. Apart from working in the Museum, the highlight of my study-leave in Germany was the coveted opportunity of visiting the island of Heligoland with Stresemann, and participating in the bird migration studies being conducted there under the direction of the enthusiastic Dr Rudolf Drost.

Heligoland is a barren rock, standing abruptly out of the North Sea at the mouths of the rivers Elbe and Weser, about thirty miles from the German mainland, and directly on the route of migratory birds

from the north. It is triangular in shape and with sheer rocky sides 200 feet high. The top of the island—or the Oberland—is an undulating tableland, beautifully turfed with green but practically treeless due to the heavy gales that ceaselessly sweep over it. Therefore, in order to tempt the migrants down, a sunken trapping garden—the Sapskule—about 120 metres long and 15 wide has been constructed at the northern end of the Oberland, thickly planted with shrubs and bushes and provided with little pools of fresh water for the birds. The shrubbery helps to hide the cleverly designed tapering chicken-wire traps, ending in small glass-fronted boxes into which the birds can be driven and concentrated and removed for ringing. The depth of the sunken garden is increased by a concrete wall 2.5 metres high all round the basin, which affords further protection from the wind to the fairly tall shrubs within. It was at Heligoland that I had my first practical demonstration of the ringing techniques that have since been so widely and successfully employed by the BNHS in its various field projects.

In addition to the trapping garden, Heligoland possesses a powerful lighthouse of some 42,000 candle-power, whose beams, on certain cloud-overcast nights in spring and autumn, act as a magnet for tens of thousands of migratory birds. The birds dash against the glass panes round the turret and fall dazed and fluttering on to the surrounding balcony, whence they are gathered in gunny sacks in enormous numbers and taken for ringing. This attraction of the migrating birds to the lighthouse is essentially the same as what happens on similar cloudy and starless monsoon nights at the Meghalaya village of Jatinga in north-east India, sensationally reported by some of our newspapers as 'mass suicide' by birds!

Under the right meteorological conditions as many as 1,200 or more birds may be taken in a single night for ringing, in addition to the hundreds upon hundreds gathered by the local Heligolanders, who turn out in force on a God-sent night like this, to replenish their larders.



Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey

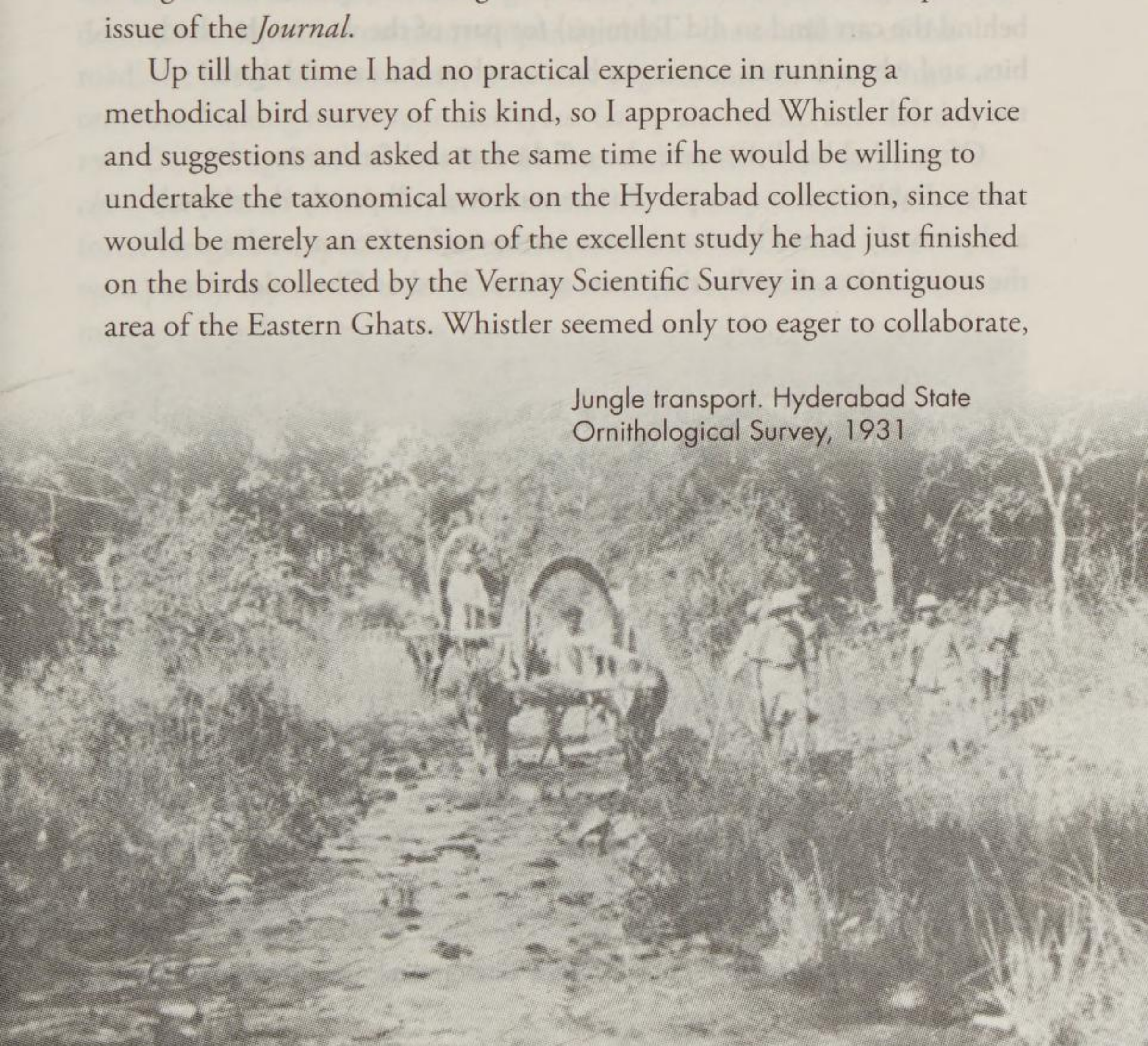
It was while refugeeing at Kihim as an unemployed and unsuccessful job-hunter after my return from Germany in early 1930, and pondering how I could utilize what little expertise I had acquired abroad, that the idea of the regional ornithological surveys first came to me. There were vast tracts of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the Princely States, whose avifauna had been little explored and studied. I offered the BNHS to carry out systematic field surveys of the bird life of these areas on a voluntary basis, provided they would raise the necessary funds to cover the actual working expenses, transport, etc., arrange for camping facilities and local assistance from the state forest and other government departments, and loan me the services of one or two of the Society's field collectors and taxidermists. Hyderabad State represented the largest gap in our ornithological knowledge; it was the obvious first priority, considering the important results recently obtained by the Vernay Scientific Survey in the adjoining area of the Eastern Ghats. After seemingly endless ding-dong correspondence with the Nizam's government authorities, a grant of Rs 3,000 for three months of field work was finally sanctioned, and soon thereafter the Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey began. As the entire state could not be covered within the stipulated period, the government sanctioned a renewal of the grant for a further two months.

Hugh Whistler, the foremost British student of Indian birds in his day, was, like E.C. Stuart Baker, also an officer in the Imperial Police Service. He served the entire sixteen years or so before his premature voluntary retirement in Punjab. During his tenure in India he collected and studied birds in the field so thoroughly and perceptively that one unfamiliar with his professional efficiency would suspect police work to have been for him merely an occasional spare-time occupation. By the time he left the country he had acquired an unsurpassed knowledge not only of the ornithology of Punjab but also of neighbouring Kashmir

and the NWFP, and, in the process, of the entire British Indian Empire as well. After settling down at Battle in Sussex he continued to develop his expertise on birds, particularly Indian and Palaearctic, but now more on the taxonomic side with only periodical forays for field collecting.

My relations with Whistler, strangely as with so many of my English friends, started on a somewhat jarring and acrimonious note. In an admirable serial article he was writing in the *Journal* of the BNHS around the year 1928, 'The Study of Indian Birds', Whistler had made a statement concerning the structure of the elongated tail feathers of the Racket-tailed Drongo which I contradicted. I did not know Whistler personally at that time, and he had possibly never heard of me as having anything to do with birds. He was obviously peeved at being openly contradicted and wrote a rather snooty letter to the editors, Sir Reginald Spence and S.H. Prater. However, after re-examining his specimens and being convinced that I was right he corrected himself in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*.

Up till that time I had no practical experience in running a methodical bird survey of this kind, so I approached Whistler for advice and suggestions and asked at the same time if he would be willing to undertake the taxonomical work on the Hyderabad collection, since that would be merely an extension of the excellent study he had just finished on the birds collected by the Vernay Scientific Survey in a contiguous area of the Eastern Ghats. Whistler seemed only too eager to collaborate,



Jungle transport. Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey, 1931

and I soon received from him a list of excellent suggestions on how such a survey could be carried out. These suggestions, together with the helpful tips received in the field from time to time from my guru, Stresemann, proved invaluable during this and subsequent bird surveys.

Many of the areas I selected for the specimen collecting in Hyderabad State (Oct.–Dec. 1931, Mar.–Apr. 1932) had primitive communication facilities. Their remoteness, partly, was my rationale for selecting them. They could be reached only on foot or by unsprung bullock carts known as *khachars* over dusty, deeply rutted and bumpy cross-country tracks, or *kutcha* forest roads cut up by unbridged rocky nullahs, mostly dry in that season—roads that would nowadays be euphemistically termed jeepable. However, that was long before the jeep was born. Such nullahs were crossed by the cart storming down one steep boulder-strewn bank and up the opposite one, to the frantic shouting, stick-waving and tail-twisting of the bullocks by the cartmen. I usually preferred to walk behind the cart (and so did Tehmina) for part of the way in the shady bits, and when the sun wasn't too hot, or when the cart ride got too painful.

Often [the] localities were also off the few and far-between bus routes. Public motor transport in the state was still poorly developed, and privately owned buses were rare in the *mofussil* towns and out-of-the-way stations. Usually, they were ancient Ford or Chevrolet cars

Hyderabad Survey. Camp Teppal Margoo, Utnoor, Adilabad district, 1930

converted by local talent into rattling bone-shakers, with sides of 3-ply wood or galvanized iron sheeting and no restriction on the number of passengers they could carry. Even these were often difficult to hire without some coaxing, or various degrees of official pressure from the local police sub-inspector or other official to whom orders for rendering assistance to the survey party had trickled down from above. That the private buses were truly independent left little doubt in one, from the behaviour and business methods of their owner-drivers, who, by and large, were a sorry tribe. In spite of repeated exhortations to them to be punctual, and solemn assurances from them to come for loading up at six in the morning, there would be no sign of the bus till seven or eight, while you sat on your pile of baggage all packed and ready, or paced up and down muttering curses. With many or all of these routine obstacles it was seldom before nine that we could strike the road, when the day would already be warming up nicely. Thereafter, arrival at the destination depended on many imponderables—the condition of the road, the health of the wheezy, asthmatic engine, and the wear of the ominous-looking much-retreaded tyres. Camp sites varied between a PWD Dak Bungalow, a Forest Rest House, and sometimes a vacated *chauri* or disused cowshed. At that time, before Independence, dak and forest bungalows, specially the less frequented out-of-the-way ones, were poorly appointed: a couple of the standard iron bedsteads (without mattress or pillow) and a few wooden chairs and tables, etc. were usually all they could provide; you had thus to travel fully self-contained. Bedding, towels, sheets, buckets, cooking utensils, lamps, crockery, cutlery, etc. all had to be carted round—plus folding camp beds for unexpected cowsheds.

With bullock carts or manual porterage, where motor buses were not feasible, it was necessary to fix short distances between camps, perhaps eight or ten miles; with motor transport they seldom exceeded thirty to fifty miles. The process of opening up the specimen boxes, arranging the work tables and general settling in took a couple of hours, and it was therefore usually late afternoon by the time we were ready for the evening round of specimen collecting. My strategy, refined by experience and circumstances, was to brief my assistant, the taxidermist, and leave to him the job of collecting the commoner birds around the camp. One of the BNHS field assistants who accompanied me on most of my later bird surveys was a young East Indian Christian—as a point of

honour his confreres insisted on differentiating him from a mere Goan in those Portuguese colonial days. His name was John Gabriel, a quiet, dependable and amazingly fast bird skinner who turned out excellent bird skins. Gabriel could also be trusted to correctly identify the birds he was told specially to look out for, which made things very satisfactory in every way. Every forenoon when we returned from our respective collecting rounds it was a ritual for me to ask Gabriel what luck he had had, and all too frequent the answer would be the same—his own picturesque and invariable formula—'I tried and tried to get some goodgood birds but saw nothing except this' (dejectedly pulling out the mangled remains of a myna or some other common bird from his haversack), 'so I said "Let's take"'. In the absence of 'goodgood' birds I must confess sometimes having had recourse to the same pragmatic procedure myself, since for subspecific determination common birds are also of importance.

From a study of large-scale Survey of India topographical sheets for diverse and promising physical features, and after discussion with local forest staff and village shikaris, areas within a radius of ten miles or so, which could be conveniently investigated on foot, were identified. This general plan worked satisfactorily on the whole during my other regional surveys as well; few biotopes or facies escaped attention and few bird species got away uncollected or unrecorded. This at least is what I had hopefully imagined at the time; it was only years later, after mist netting came into general use,* that I realized that a few nocturnal or exceptionally unobtrusive species possibly did manage to evade the reckoning.

The opening gambit of the Hyderabad ornithological survey of October 1931—itself the first of the series of such regional surveys—was Mananur, a largish, sprawling village situated on the Amrabad Plateau at an altitude of 2,000 feet in the Nallamalai Hills—a *taluka* headquarters town in Mahboobnagar district. The excellent reserved forest around was of the mixed moist-deciduous type, with an abundance of teak and *nallamaddi* (*Terminalia tomentosa*)—my first experience of many such sylvan paradises explored subsequently in so many different corners of the country. The Mananur locality stands out vividly in my memory for its wealth of wild animals, including a greater number of tigers than

* Pub.: In India mist nets were first used in 1959 with the inception of the WHO/BNHS bird ringing project.

Eldest brother
Hasham Moiz-ud-din, *c.* 1946

I had ever experienced before. The second camp, Farahabad, twelve miles to the south and on a higher plateau (2,800 feet) was earmarked by the State government for development as a hill station, but the plan never materialized. It was the home of an Adivasi tribe, the Chenchu, so well studied and documented by the anthropologist Fürer-Haimendorf. There was no road up to the little rest house on the hill, only a foot track, so the baggage and equipment had to be carried in head-loads by Chenchu tribals—men, women and children—*begar (*forced labour) I fear, raked up by the local *tahsildar*. Their official daily hire, as I recall in disbelief, was one seer (*c.* 1 kg) of jowar per head. Payment was in kind, since even up to that time the Chenchus, living so cut off from 'civilization', had little use for money, so we were told, and preferred to receive their wages this way. The atrocious system of begar—actually a form of slavery—persisted in the Nizam's state in practice long after it was abolished by law elsewhere.

At Nelipaka, a backwoods cluster of dilapidated hovels on the bank of the Godavari river, a few miles from Borgampad, we were encamped in an abandoned cowshed on the outskirts of the village. Walls had been improvised from old bamboo matting which partly kept out the fierce afternoon sun. Word had gone round that a party of queer Bombayites had come with the object of shooting every kind of bird found in the locality and noting down how they tasted. Thus, soon after our arrival we were besieged by a motley crowd of urchins and other inquisitive village folk, some of whom offered themselves as local shikaris and who were in fact well known to be unabashed professional poachers.

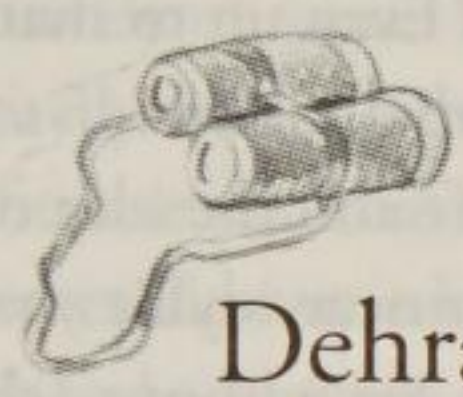
Every couple of weeks or so, depending on how remote and off-beat the survey localities were, we were obliged to surface from the wilds into 'civilization' and Hyderabad city for refitting—laying in provisions and supplies not procurable in the backwoods. During these breaks we

usually stayed with brother Hasham and his family in their pleasant Saifabad home. Hasham was my eldest brother, eighteen years older than I, and the father of Suleiman, my bird-keeping partner in the early Khetwadi days.

In 1931, at the time the Hyderabad survey was in the field, the *Journal* of the BNHS was publishing a series of articles on 'The Preservation of Wildlife in the Indian Empire' dealing with the different provinces and princely states individually. I was requested by the Society to contribute the section on Hyderabad State, since I was on the spot and had the opportunity and facilities for collecting first-hand data. Up to 1897 there was, it seems, no restriction as to tiger or any other shooting. According to the game regulations, introduced only in 1914, no hunting could be done by anyone in the state without a government permit, except by the Nizam and his family, and the Paigah nobles and *jagirdars*. But up till 1933 there was no Arms Act in the Nizam's dominions, and the state was bristling with guns of every description. They were mostly vintage muzzle-loaders, it is true, but good enough for slaughtering animals at waterholes, which seemed to be the approved method of the poacher, judging from the number of rude *machans* on trees, and pits in the ground near the water's edge, wherever one came across a pool in the forest. In spite of the belated game regulations, therefore, and with no regard by the poacher for season, age or sex of the quarry, the larger animals were disappearing rapidly, a trend that has unfortunately been accelerated by the advent of the jeep since the Second World War, the change from feudalism to democracy and the consequent all round loosening of control of arms and forest regulations.

My investigations showed that, by and large, the *muntazims* (game wardens) and watchers of the *shikargahs* or royal game preserves were a thoroughly corrupt and 'measly' lot. The information they supplied about local conditions and wildlife was seldom reliable, and it seemed conceivable that a good deal of the poaching—much of it by government officials, high and low—was tolerated by them either actively or through indifference and neglect. No wonder then that Hyderabad State, which in the early years of the nineteenth century included some of the finest tiger and other big-game areas in the country, had been reduced to such a sorry plight a mere hundred years later. Although the Nizam himself did not hunt, the two elder princes were accomplished butchers. Around May 1935, soon after my survey,

the then heir-apparent, Azam Jah Bahadur, and his party, in the course of thirty-three days' shooting from sybaritic *machans* fitted with a variety of 'home comforts'—including field telephones to report minute-by-minute progress of the tiger during a beat—killed thirty-five tigers, in addition to numerous bears, sambar, and other game in proportion, in the shikargahs of Pakhal, Mulug and others.



Dehra Dun and Bahawalpur 1934–9

Four years after the return from Germany, when I still remained without a permanent job and home, we thought it was time to stop living like gypsies or inflicting ourselves on friends and relations, and to look out for a pleasanter, quieter and less expensive place to live than Bombay, yet not an entirely social and intellectual backwater. My brother Hamid, who on retirement from the ICS had settled down in Mussoorie, suggested Dehra Dun at the foot of the hill-station as just such a place, and we accepted his suggestion with alacrity. To the attractions I had dreamed of earlier there would now be the added one of living close to Hamid, who was not only my favourite brother but also my *beau ideal* of a rational, this-worldly human being, and one I greatly admired.

From my boyhood days, and long before I had ever set eyes upon them, I had a romantic craving for the Himalaya and often day-dreamed that in later life, if I ever got the option of choosing a place to settle in, it would most certainly be somewhere among the foothills of the Himalaya where I would have at my doorstep, as it were, all the things that mattered most to me—beautiful forests, magnificent scenery, good birding, trekking in the mountains and plenty of opportunities for game shooting and 'naturalizing'. Through a kaleidoscopic shuffling of fate my dream had now come true, at least partially. Tehmina and I had spent five of the happiest years of our lives in Dehra Dun among loving friends and stimulating intellectual company and enchanting surroundings, and with a sense of fulfilment in my own case. These good times were

cut short by a great personal tragedy in my life. After a comparatively unrisky surgical operation Tehmina developed blood poisoning and died in July 1939. Now that she was gone I had a hard decision to face: to stay on or to migrate. My youngest sister Kamrunnisa—Kamoo for short—two years my senior—and her husband Hassan (son of my father's elder brother Faizulhussain) lovingly insisted on my giving up living alone, and very kindly invited me to come to Bombay and share their beautiful home at Pali Hill, Bandra. Even up to that time Pali Hill was a quiet and delightfully green residential suburb.

I had never been enamoured of city life and the idea of my voluntarily returning to Bombay after our near-idyllic years in Dehra Dun was not appealing. Yet without Tehmina life in Dehra Dun had not been, and could never be, the same. The main considerations that decided my fate were, firstly, the loving offer of Kamoo and Hassan, who had always been particularly dear and close to us both, and the presence in Bombay of the Natural History Society with its excellent bird collection, library, congenial colleagues and other facilities for the continuance of my work. Leaving Dehra Dun was a painful wrench, but in retrospect I feel it was the correct decision and it has been largely responsible for whatever success I have achieved since then.

It was in August 1934, while living in Dehra Dun, that I drew up a modest project proposal for research in economic ornithology. From quite early on I had felt that there were immense possibilities and potential for detailed studies on the food and feeding habits of birds in their bearing on our two basic industries, namely agriculture and forestry. This feeling was encouraged by the researches and publications of, and by my correspondence with, workers like Forbes, McAttee and Cottam in the Bureau of Biological Survey, USA, Collinge in the UK, and others in Germany, Japan and elsewhere. The proposal was submitted through Dr W. Burns, the Director of Agriculture, Bombay Presidency, for the consideration of the then 'Imperial' (now Indian) Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

In the prologue to the scheme I pointed out the vitally important role of birds in agriculture, horticulture and forestry in India which had not been recognized or appreciated; that their impact was of a dual nature, meaning that while birds could on the one hand be highly destructive to cereal crops and orchard fruit, they could on the other be highly beneficial in controlling the ravages of insect pests and other vermin such as rodents, since these largely constituted the food of many species, and exclusively of some. I suggested that in a country like ours, which leans so heavily on agriculture and forestry, their impact was of a very special significance and that since the economic status of one and the same species often fluctuated between beneficial and harmful—from hatching to adulthood and from season to season—it was essential for a meaningful assessment of a bird's economic status to study its entire life history and bionomics.

Soft-bodied insects are usually so mashed up inside a bird's stomach that it is seldom possible to identify them. This difficulty can be substantially resolved by field observation of the feeding behaviour of the bird and the nature of its prey. Similarly, many species of birds are adapted for a diet of flower nectar, in the process of procuring which they effect cross-pollination by transferring pollen adhering to their head feathers, and are thus of great usefulness in the propagation of plants. Stomach examination of such birds will show no more than some colourless liquid and is unlikely to disclose the identity of the source (species of flower), unless the bird has been observed actually feeding from a particular flower. To establish the overall economic impact of a bird species in a given area it is also necessary to take periodical censuses of its local population—its biomass—and to acquire precise knowledge of its ecology, breeding biology and population dynamics.

All this implies a comprehensive co-ordinated study of the life history of the bird by a trained field ornithologist, assisted in the laboratory by an experienced entomologist and a botanist capable of identifying seeds and plant remains. It also implies the ready availability of a representative seed collection and other comparative reference material of this type. Such research had been and is still carried out extensively in the UK and many other countries of Europe. In the USA the erstwhile Bureau of Biological Survey—a branch of the US Department of Agriculture—has accumulated a vast amount of information of sterling

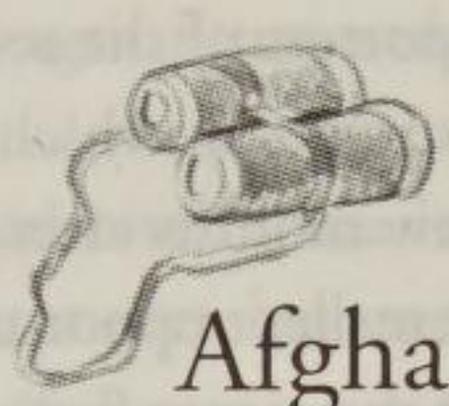
pragmatic value to agriculture and forestry, besides the purely scientific aspect.

How naïvely optimistic I was in imagining that the scheme would materialize shortly, or ever, became clear only when efforts had to be finally abandoned after two years of a seemingly interminable ding-dong correspondence and statements and clarification before individuals and committees galore. And this in spite of the strongest support the scheme had received from the BNHS and from Dr Burns and other influential members of the Bombay Provincial Agriculture Research Committee. The procedure in those days (it may be so today for all I know!) was chiefly on the principle of judicious 'back-scratching', or what may be regarded as a refined form of horse-trading. The various provinces each put up their various development of research schemes to the ICAR (the central Imperial Council of Agricultural Research) for funding. These were then scrutinized by an Advisory Committee representing the various provinces and miscellaneous 'experts'. If Bombay supported a Punjab scheme—in other words if Bombay scratched Punjab's back—there was a reasonable chance of the compliment being returned, and vice versa. This was the general plan of operation. My economic ornithology research scheme, after being tossed about a couple of times on various pretexts, finally got approved *in principle* but found seventeenth place on the priorities list of ICAR. Dr Burns, who had zealously supported and piloted the scheme from its conception through all its vicissitudes, wrote in disgust and after much previous bitter experience that since under the circumstances it was unpredictable when the scheme's turn for funding might come, if ever, it would be just as well for me to forget about it and start chasing a different hare.

Hugh Whistler and I were both anxious to follow up the gratifying collection made in Jodhpur State in 1933 by one of the BNHS field collectors, V.S. Lapersonne, with a more comprehensive survey of the entire Rajputana desert, the bird life of which was imperfectly known. My sights were set on Bahawalpur State as the next target. I was eager also to revive my association with the desert, remembered from the school vacations with my brother Hamid on his duty tours in Sind. The bird survey of Bahawalpur State in early 1939 was made possible through the personal interest of the British Resident of the Rajputana States Agency and one Mr Atkinson, a retired British Indian policeman, then employed as 'Shikar Officer' in the Ameer's government—both of

whom were active members and supporters of the BNHS. Incidentally, Bahawalpur was the last of the field surveys in which Tehmina participated. Sadly, she died only a few months after it was completed.

The Bahawalpur survey provided excellent opportunities for looking a bit more closely into the problem of the camouflaging coloration of desert animals—a subject that has always fascinated me. Meinertzhagen, who had made a special study of desert birds and life conditions in African and Asian deserts, had postulated with sound supporting evidence that the density of humidity in the atmosphere controls the amount of ultraviolet radiation penetrating to the earth and all life thereon. The very low humidity in the desert allows a higher percentage of ultraviolet rays to come through, whereas saturated air greatly impedes this process. Thus the greater the exposure to ultraviolet radiation the greater the paleness (as in the desert soil and the animals on it); conversely the less the ultraviolet radiation the darker the soil and the animal inhabitants thereon. It would seem that the same factor or factors that make the desert soil pale coloured are also responsible for making its inhabitants desert coloured and less visible in their surroundings. After drenching in a chance rain shower, I observed that the sandy coloration of desert birds, like the Desert Finch-Lark and the Desert Courser, darkened to exactly the same shade of brown as the sodden soil upon which they found themselves. The birds, whose pale sandy coloration was of obliterative value to them in an environment of pale dry desert sand, now enjoyed the same advantage when the soil was rain-sodden and considerably darker. This tends to support Meinertzhagen's suggestion that it may be the same common factor that is responsible both for the similarity in coloration of desert animals and their environment. I felt gratified when, after reading the Bahawalpur report, Meinertzhagen wrote to me: 'I was much interested in your observation on the effect of rain on plumage. It is curious how these obvious little truths get overlooked, and I think there might be a great deal in what you say. I hope you will allow me to use the idea in my Morocco paper.'

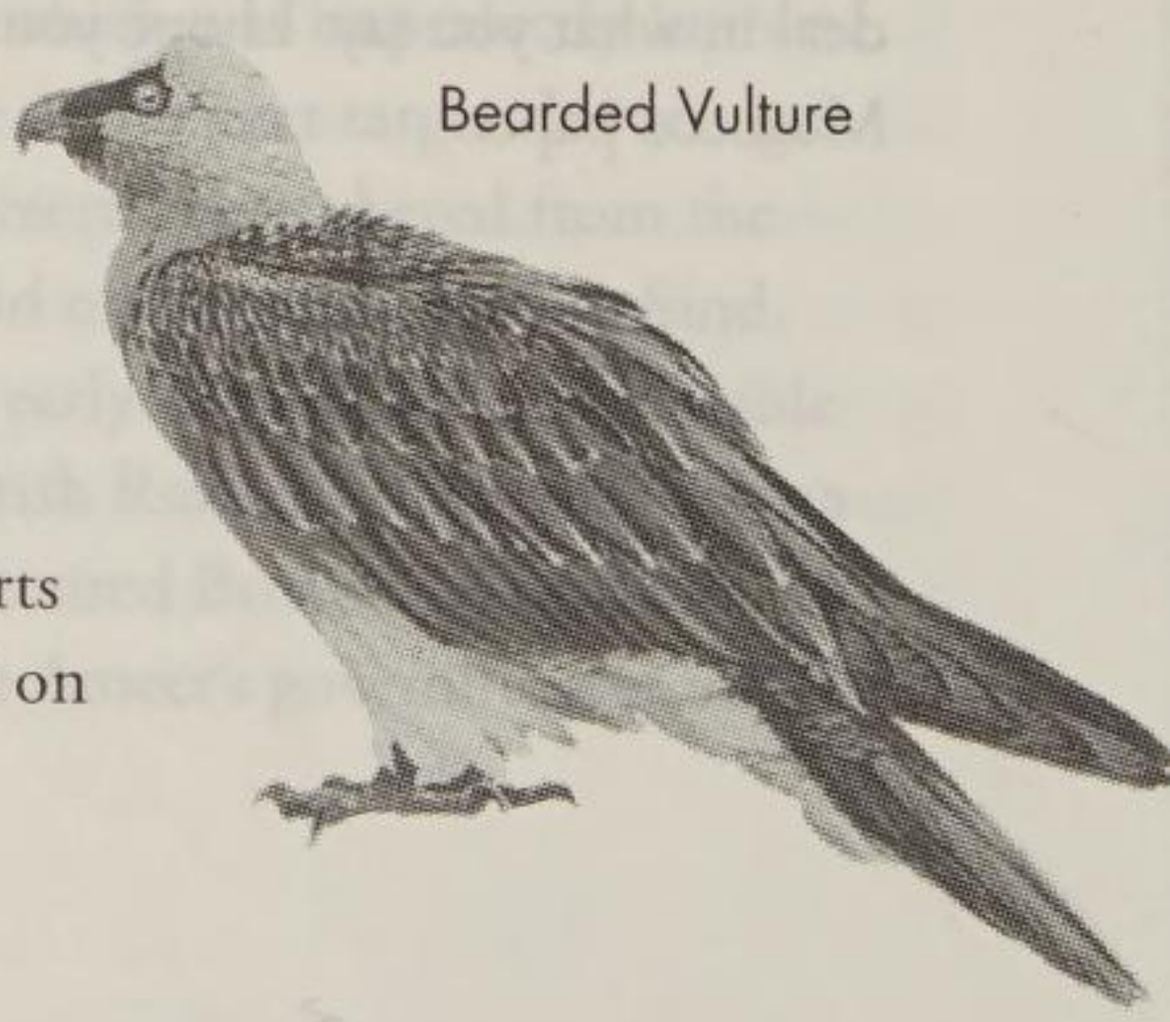


Afghanistan

Some time in 1935 my ornithologist friend Hugh Whistler wrote to me from England that Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, the noted British ornithologist, was planning a collecting trip to Afghanistan and was on the lookout for a companion to help him with the birds. Whistler asked if I would be prepared to go. I said I would be only too happy, since Afghanistan was an adjoining area to our own, yet so little known ornithologically. However, I said that as my own particular interest was ecology and I would not enjoy skinning birds, etc. all the time, additional help would be needed. Whistler cautioned me: 'He is a great stickler—and rightly so—for the perfect preparation of all specimens in whatever branch of science, so you would need to keep a careful eye on the skinners.' The expedition didn't come off till 1937 as Meinertzhagen was preoccupied with another one in Kenya in 1936.

Richard Meinertzhagen was one of the most colourful, original and, in many ways, likeable characters that ornithology introduced me to. As an officer in the British army he had spent most of his military service in East Africa. His exploits as a soldier and big-game hunter and ornithologist make fascinating reading in his *Kenya Diary* and the several other books he wrote about Kenya and Tanganyika under colonial rule. He had a passing acquaintance with India, where he had done temporary stints of service and convalescence during the First World War. When asked if he had managed to pick up any Hindi or Urdu while in India he replied that he had only learnt the useful term *sooar ka bacha* (swine), which he had encoded as 'SKB' and frequently used in private conversation when referring to 'opposition' folk. He was a man completely devoid of sentimentalism and impervious to personal danger, and almost so to physical pain.

While we were collecting in a reedy marsh near Kabul, he, wearing khaki shorts with legs uncovered, accidentally stepped on



Bearded Vulture

a barb-pointed reed which broke off, leaving about three-quarters of an inch of its length within his flesh. Regardless of this, he continued splodging through the marsh while his blood flowed freely.
Finally, after some persuasion, he agreed to return. As he was limping back to the car to get back and have the barb removed by the embassy doctor, he noticed a Bearded Vulture—a wanted species—some 300 yards away in a different direction. Ignoring the projecting reed and the flowing blood he limped up to the bird and shot it before getting back to the car.

Following our first meeting at Bombay where he arrived on 11 February 1937, Meinertzhagen's meticulously kept diary, which he kindly permitted me to read 'At your risk(!)' shortly before his death, when our earlier shaky contact had ripened into abiding friendship, says: 'I then went on to the Bombay Natural History Society where I met Prater and Sálim Ali. I was favourably impressed by the latter and liked what I saw of him. It is as well if we have to travel together for the next few months. He seemed intelligent, but is hideously ugly, not unlike Gandhi.'

For the additional help in skinning birds I selected N.G. Pillai, who had been seconded to my Travancore bird survey in 1933–4 by the Trivandrum museum. Pillai was a competent zoologist, a good worker, and above all a soft-spoken, gentle-mannered individual who I knew would get on well in a mixed party of imponderables. His only failing was that he was perhaps too meek and mild for this Afghanistan set-up, on account of which he had sometimes to pay in petty humiliations.
Besides Pillai, I had hired as skinner a local Christian scamp named Dyson from Dehra Dun. I knew Dyson from several previous expeditions as a congenital shirker and malingerer. But he was a useful drudge and a good worker if one kept twisting his tail, which I was sure Meinertzhagen was capable of doing, and more. In addition to these two we had with us a burly, handsome Pathan 'bearer', picked up en route in Peshawar. He was a competent man who had worked with foreigners before and knew the ways of the sahibs (for which he undisguisedly didn't much care!).

We had hired a rickety old open Chevrolet truck in Peshawar for the journey to Kabul, and into it we piled our tents and camping gear, specimen boxes, stores, rations and personal baggage. The Sikh driver, Meinertzhagen and I sat on the front seat; Pillai, Dyson, the Pathan bearer, the cleaner, and one or two nondescript hangers-on,

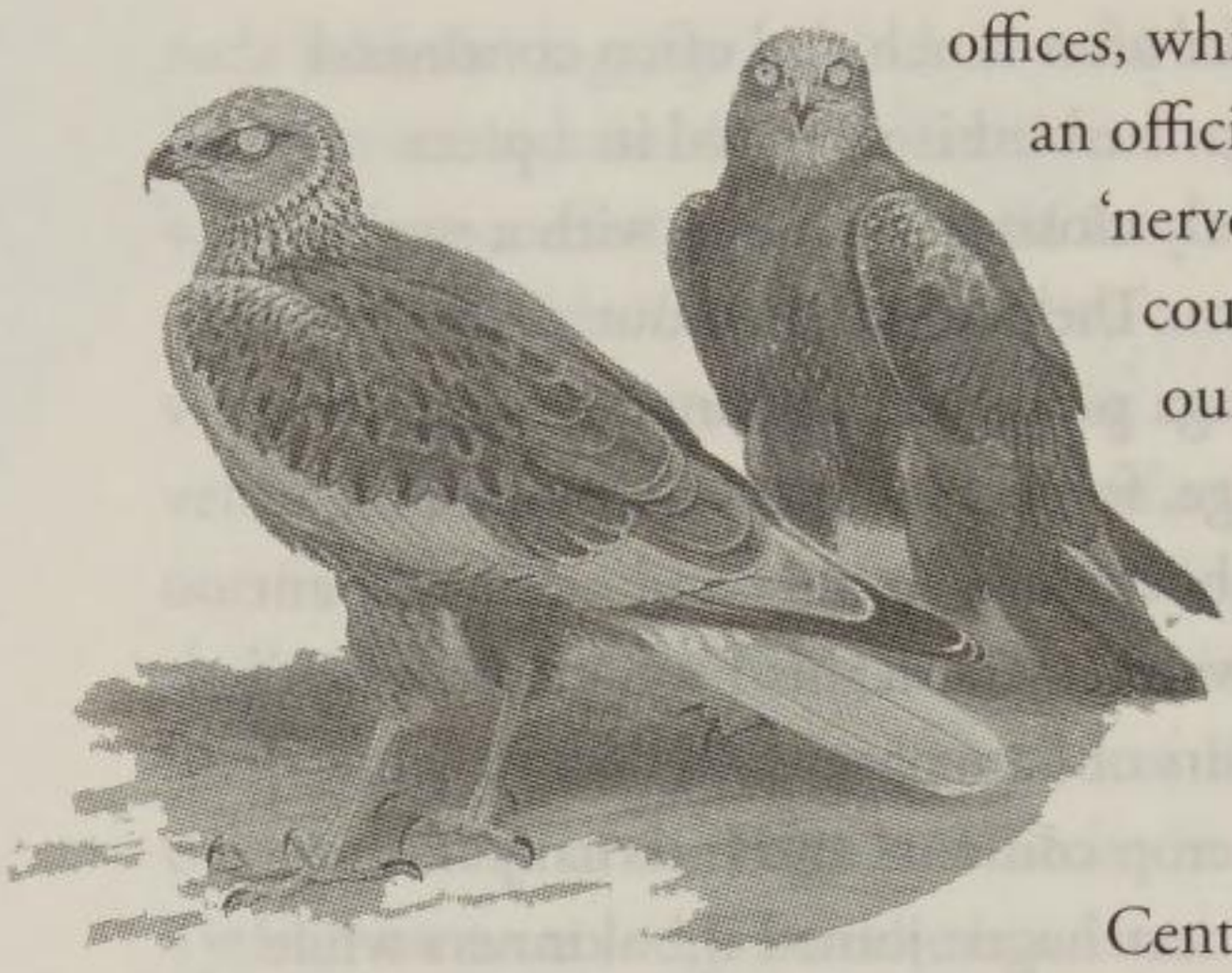
rode with the luggage behind. It was early April and the winter snow had just started melting. The untarred mountain road was slushy and with numerous hairpin bends and fearsome vertical drops of hundreds of feet on the *khud* side. The Sardarji at the wheel turned out to be a veritable Jehu. He revelled in cutting corners at speed and skidding his vehicle round greasy bends in spite of repeated remonstrances, and kept our fingers crossed and hair on end. We got to Kabul after dark, rather shaken but thankful that the ordeal had ended. The journey through the Khyber Pass to Jalalabad and on to Kabul took two days. Thanks to the hospitality of the British Minister in Kabul (Colonel Sir Kerr Fraser-Tytler), we were lodged in the luxurious Legation Building (built with Indian government money) which, at that time, must surely have been one of the grandest of its kind anywhere in the world (all to uphold the prestige and majesty of the Raj, no doubt), and it was perhaps more lavishly appointed than any international 5-star hotel today. Our entire expedition in the country north of Kabul as far as the Oxus river (the boundary of the USSR) lasted about eight weeks. The Afghan government was hospitably co-operative throughout, and had even assigned a *mehmandar*—a sort of liaison officer—(easy-going, comfortable-shaped) to travel with our party and help clear all official and other hurdles, procure local assistance and supplies, and generally to see to it that we had complete freedom to move about in the countryside. And, as Meinertzhagen so aptly put it later, 'these many duties he carried out with indolent efficiency'.

Our daily routine of work was for Meinertzhagen and I to start out after breakfast, around 7:30, in different directions, accompanied by a local shikari as guide, and collect and bird-watch till about noon. Back in camp the specimens were sorted out and readied for delousing. Meinertzhagen's special interest on the expedition, in addition to birds, was to collect the mallophaga (or feather lice) infesting them. These insects are not blood-sucking like the vulgar little creatures we know by that name; they live within the plumage of a bird and feed on the decaying portions of the feathers. They are so narrowly host-specific that a species found on an oriole, say, will not be found on a myna. Thus if the same species of mallophaga is found on two different species of bird, that indicates their probable phylogenetic relationship. In this way mallophaga are of great importance for the study of evolution and taxonomy.

Our indoor activities commenced after lunch and often continued till after dark. To collect mallophaga the bird is wrapped in a piece of white muslin and put into a tightly closing box along with a swab of cotton wool soaked in chloroform. The bird is taken out after a few minutes and the dead mallophaga picked off the linen wrapper and shaken out of the bird's plumage, forcepped into vials containing alcohol and carefully labelled as to host, date, locality and other relevant particulars. While Meinertzhagen was busy with this I weighed the birds, made notes of the moults and colours of bare parts, and dissected the skinned ones for sex, stomach and crop contents and internal parasites. When finished with delousing Meinertzhagen joined the skinners while I wrote up my field notes of the morning.

The expedition party consisted of two Christians, one Hindu, one Sikh and three Muslims of two varieties. Doomsayers had prognosticated that none of us, particularly the *kafirs* (unbelievers), would come back alive: the Afghans were such bigoted Muslims and the country so overrun by brigands that we would be looted, murdered, etc., etc. In the event not once in the entire trip were we ever asked our religion, and we found the Afghan country folk extremely friendly and hospitable. Frequently, when out collecting, villagers working in the fields would run up to us saying, 'You are our welcome guests: you must come to our house and drink some tea.' The open truck with all our personal belongings, rations and even ammunition was left on the roadside wherever we were camping, and we never lost a thing and no one ever bothered us. Except the flies! So much for the prognostications and their perpetrators: it was perhaps the frontier tribesmen our well-wishers were thinking of.

Much time was lost in travelling. From Kabul we drove north, camping in six to eight localities for five or six days each. We sometimes stayed in tents, but mostly in sheds, as there were usually no proper dak bungalows except for the fairly posh one at Bamian. Bamian, a centre of ancient Buddhist civilization, is a place of great archaeological and historical interest, with a colossal Buddha, some fifty feet or more in height, carved out of living rock. The place is visited by large numbers of foreign tourists. In the matter of accommodation the mehmandar was a great help. When necessary he would go in advance and fix up a place for us to stay in. Communication between two camps was maintained by telephone through police stations and outposts, or other government



Marsh Harrier

offices, which were all interconnected by an official network, and with Kabul, the 'nerve centre'. Thus the mehmandar could send information beforehand of our movements and get arrangements made.

It was in the Danaghori plain of north Afghanistan that we had our first meeting with the Common Pheasant in its ancestral Central Asian homeland, and I was surprised to find that its natural habitat here was the extensive swampy reed-beds, with practically no trees to roost in. Our Afghan bird collection was especially interesting for me as it contained several species which, till then, I had never come across in my life, such as Snowcock and Seesee Partridge. However, for me the highlight of the whole expedition was the spring (northward) migration that was in visual progress all the time we were in the country, like that of the Redlegged Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*) and Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) from Africa to East Asia, and the unbelievable hordes of Rosy Pastor from the Indian plains to their nesting grounds in Turkestan. It was at Danaghori that we struck their main migration. Many thousands of these birds, known as *Saach* in Afghanistan, were feeding and resting en route between 4 and 10 May, their numbers being constantly added to by arrivals from the south. Meinertzhagen estimated that on 6 May they were arriving at the rate of 15,400 in seven hours. During the first week in May there must have been close on half a million Pastors on the Danaghori plain, most of them roosting in the marshy reed-beds. There were no crops available at the time and the birds seemed to be subsisting entirely on beetles and other insects. The Afghans recognize the *Saach* as beneficial to agriculture and do not molest them even when little other 'lawful meat' is safe from the pot. Another spectacular instance of visual mass migration of Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) was encountered at Bamian on 24 April. The birds, all adult males, suddenly commenced arriving at 6 p.m. from a south-eastern and southern direction, which could mean from the Indian subcontinent. They were obviously exhausted, for they came down and settled in a ploughed field for the night. We counted some sixty-six birds, and more

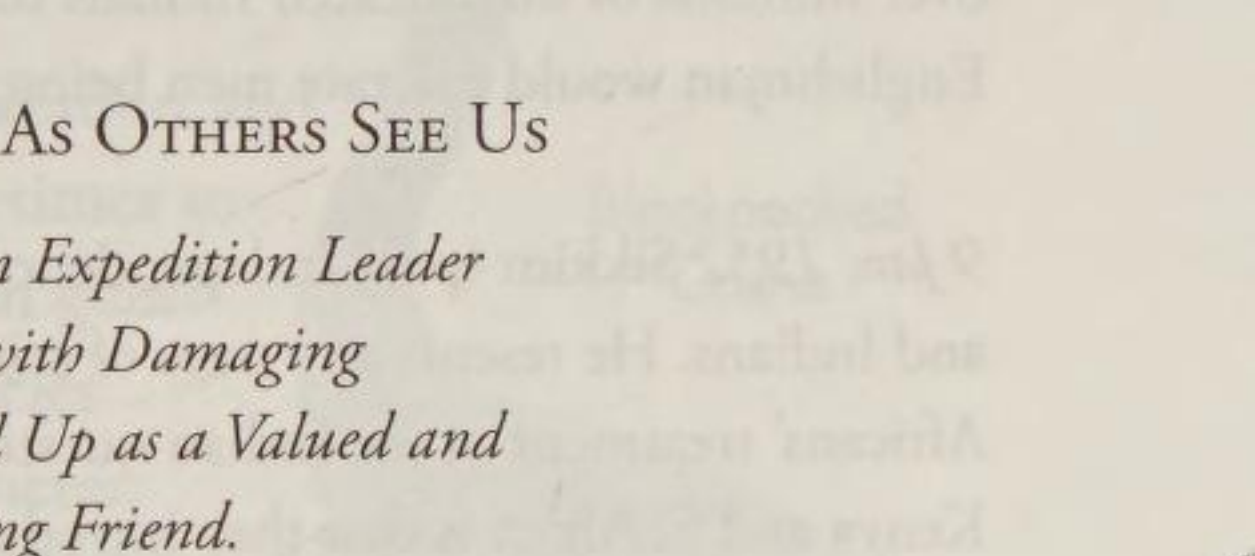
were still arriving when it got too dark to see. One rarely sees more than one or two adult male Marsh Harriers during the course of a day on a large marsh in India, therefore to see such a concentration, and all adults of the same sex bound for their northern breeding grounds, was a truly memorable and thrilling experience. These Harriers must have moved on early, for there was no sign of them in the valley soon after daybreak. On the following day and at the same time about ten adult males arrived from the same direction, roosted in the identical ploughed field and were gone again next morning.

[Once] the whole bungalow at Haibak was stinking to high heaven. Dead rat we thought. We looked around everywhere for dead rats—under the carpets, behind the cupboards, in the corners of every room and all sorts of improbable places. No rat, but stench continuing. Then I suddenly remembered that three or four days earlier we had got a surfeit of specimens and Meinertzhagen had unstrung one bird from the carrying stick and stuffed it into his breast pocket. When I reminded him of that shirt he scornfully pooh-poohed the suggestion and the search continued. A couple of days later (we didn't change our shirts too often) when he went back to that shirt he felt something wet on his chest. Apparently that Bluethroat had been 'seasoning' in the pocket and had now reached prime condition. Meinertzhagen came up to me sheepishly and said 'Sálim, you were right. Here it is!' as he pulled out the stinking mangled little carcass. And all the while he had been grumbling and cursing at the *chowkidar* and everyone else and turning the establishment upside down!

...To See Ourselves As Others See Us

Candid Opinions of an Expedition Leader who Started Off with Damaging Reservations and Ended Up as a Valued and Understanding Friend.

Revealing Excerpts from the Diaries of Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, DSO



14th April 1937 Ghorbund Valley, 6,500 ft, Afghanistan. 'Pitching camp was a long and tedious business as Sálim is quite useless at anything of that sort and none

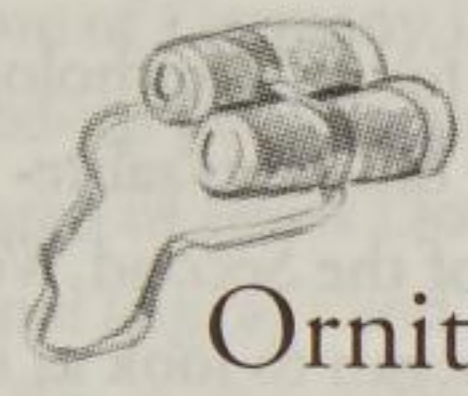
of the servants knew anything about tents or camping. Sálim is so accustomed to be waited on by an army of servants that he is impotent when he has to do something himself, and yet he advocates that his class is capable of governing India. They must first learn to govern themselves.'

15.4.1937 'I'm not enjoying this at all. I find Sálim trying. He is inefficient and cannot bear being told how to do anything and must always do everything in his own way, which is often wrong. His ignorance of camp life and his helplessness in camp are pathetic. He tells me he has never had to fend for himself in camp and has always had masses of servants before. The pleasure of camp life so much depends on one's companions.'

30.4.1937 'I am disappointed in Sálim. He is quite useless at anything but collecting. He cannot skin a bird, nor cook, nor do anything connected with camp life, packing up or chopping wood. He writes interminable notes about something—perhaps me… Even collecting he never does on his own initiative. Like all Indians he is incredibly incompetent at anything he does; if there is a wrong way of doing things he will do it, and he is quite incapable of thinking ahead.'

20.5.1937 'Sálim is the personification of the educated Indian and interests me a great deal. He is excellent at his own theoretical subjects, but has no practical ability, and at everyday little problems is hopelessly inefficient, yet he is quite sure is right in every case. His views are astounding. He is prepared to turn the British out of India tomorrow and govern the country himself. I have repeatedly told him that the British Government have no intention of handing over millions of uneducated Indians to the mercy of such men as Sálim: that no Englishman would tolerate men being governed by rats.'

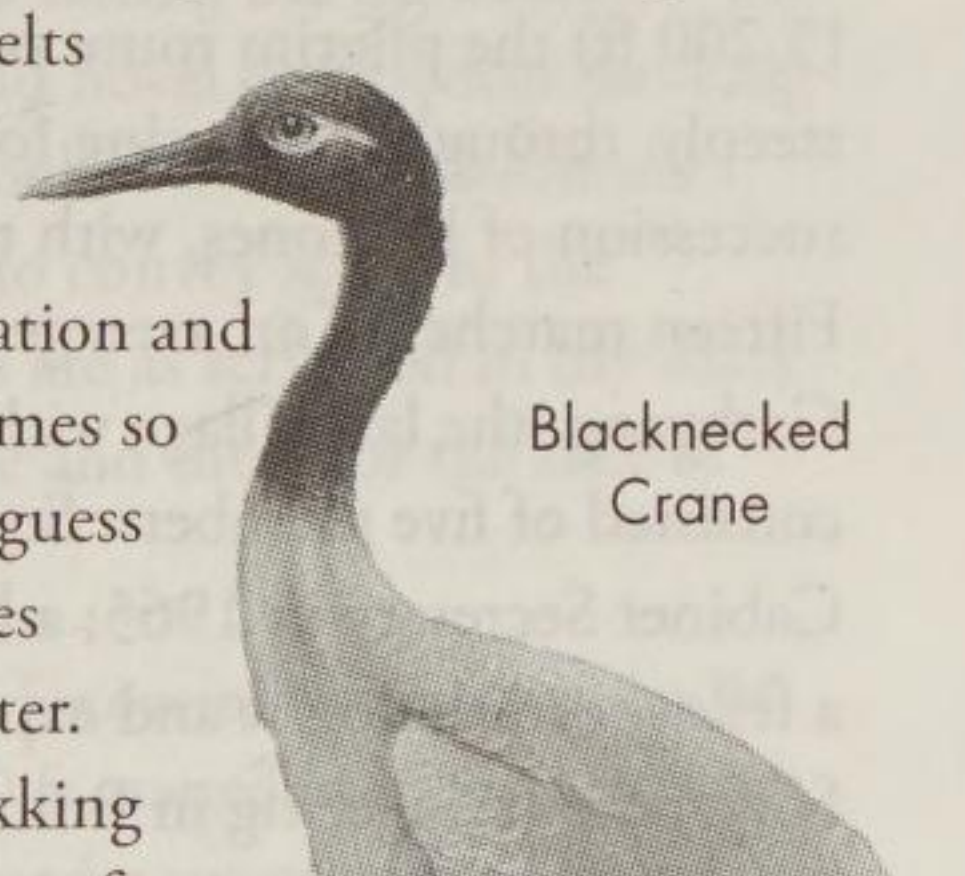
9 Jan. 1952 Sikkim (post-Independence). 'I find Sálim very touchy about India and Indians. He resents any trace of criticism and is extremely bitter about South Africans' treatment of the Indian question. My experience of Indians both in Kenya and S. Africa is that they introduced disease, dishonesty and sedition.' [Then follow violent views on Gandhi, 'the rat Gandhi', and present conditions in India of inefficiency, dishonesty and squalor, as compared with under British rule!]



Ornithological Pilgrimage to Kailas Manasarovar 1945

While living in Dehra Dun I had plenty of opportunities for mountain-trekking in the Western Himalaya—chiefly Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Garhwal and Kumaon—often in the stimulating company and under the tutelage of Arthur Foot, an enthusiastic mountaineer with considerable climbing experience in Cornwall and the Swiss Alps. This was chiefly during the long summer vacations of the Doon School of which he was the founding headmaster, as it were. Having a poor head for heights I was never tempted by anything that could be called serious mountaineering, and our ceiling on these treks hardly ever exceeded ten or twelve thousand feet. But the treks did provide opportunities for acquiring a working familiarity with the Himalayan environment—the forests, vegetation and fauna, especially birds.

One of the most exhilarating experiences for a trekking naturalist in these mountains is the kaleidoscopic change that he notices in the vegetation and bird life as he climbs higher through the succeeding life zones. These altitudinal zones or climatic belts are of absorbing interest to the student of ecology, inasmuch as each of them harbours a more or less characteristic vegetation and bird life of its own. The changes are sometimes so dramatic that after a little practice one can guess the altitude fairly accurately from the species present, even without the help of an altimeter. Indeed, for me this is one of the joys of trekking in the Himalaya, particularly the section east of Nepal—Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh—where the climate is much more humid and the life zones more abruptly telescoped into one another, from almost tropical in character at the base of the hills to arctic near the tops. Growing familiarity with the southern aspect of the Himalayan range strengthened the urge to see what



Blacknecked Crane

there was on the other side of this lofty wall. Plans for an ornithological expedition to Tibet in 1939 were thwarted, first by ominous sabre-rattling by Hitler and then by the actual outbreak of the Second World War, which, as the months and years dragged on, began to look as if it would never end. In spite, therefore, of the increasing difficulties in the supply and transport position and other wartime constraints, I decided that the expedition *had* to be now or never. With promises of official help from friends at court to the extent possible, I started planning for a modest expedition to Western Tibet—from whence there had come tantalizing reports earlier of the breeding of Barheaded Geese, Blacknecked Cranes and other exciting birds, many of which are seen in India only during the winter months and of whose nesting habits and ecology little was known. I was particularly anxious to study some of these. In fact the expedition was to be—as I described it later—an ornithological pilgrimage to Mt Kailas and Lake Manasarovar.

The normal pilgrim route from Almora was chosen not only because it provides the least rigorous access over the Lipu Lekh Pass (16,750 ft) but because it was the only pass free of snow at this time of the year, May. The regular pilgrim traffic does not commence till the end of June or the middle of July. In fact, for the return journey too we were obliged to recross the Lipu Lekh since even in the first week of July all the other passes were snow-bound. Starting from Almora in Kumaon (5,200 ft) the pilgrim route switchbacks up and down, sometimes quite steeply, through fascinating forested country constantly in and out of a succession of life zones, with the snowy ranges hardly ever out of sight. Fifteen marches of an average 13 or 14 kilometres each bring you to Garbyang, the last village within Indian territory. My party was to have consisted of five members: Sucha Singh Khera (ICS) who retired as Cabinet Secretary in 1965; a lawyer cousin, Saif Tyabji, from Bombay; a fellow ornithologist and expert bird photographer, Loke Wan Tho, of Singapore (refugeeing in Bombay from Japanese-occupied 'Shonan'); Pritam Sen, a young astro-physicist and bird-watcher lately back from the USA; and I. For one reason or another the first three had to back out—Saif for failing in the preliminary self-imposed test of physical fitness, Loke for last-minute dysentery, and Khera for some similarly compelling reason. Finally, only Pritam and I were left. We started from Almora on 14 May 1945, the day after enormous bonfires on the surrounding mountain tops for miles around proclaimed the final

collapse of Germany in Hitler's war, and amidst noisy fanfare and worked-up public rejoicing. Besides Pritam and myself, our party consisted of seven Dotiyals and one Kumaoni porter, laden with tents, personal baggage and food—chiefly the all-purpose 'tsampa' (roasted gram flour). As *sardar*, cook and factotum we had hired Khem Singh, a youngish Kumaoni from Almora. The sole non-Dotiyal porter was a docile stooge or fag of Khem Singh and was meant to discharge the same leadership function as a goat does among a flock of sheep. In the context of today's soaring cost of Himalayan treks it is interesting to recall from my diary that the daily wage of a porter carrying over a maund (*c.* 40 kg) was Rs 3 per day (all found) when marching, and Rs 2 when halting. He provided his own rations and their transport. The distance to Garbyang, the last village on the Indian side of the border—*c.* 237 km—took us fifteen days, involving a series of murderous ups and downs, often of a thousand feet or more each day and all the way. Being younger and sillier in those days, I prided in weighing myself down by stuffing my rucksack with all sorts of inessentials which needlessly added to the discomfort on the 'ups'.

The Tibet trip was one of the rare occasions of which I kept a narrative diary in addition to separate field notes on birds. On most other expeditions I relied, and still do, on companions like Loke Wan Tho, Meinertzhagen and Dillon Ripley—far more punctilious and industrious diarists that I—for happenings during the expeditions. The Tibet trip was full of interest and thrills and novel experiences too long to relate as a connected narrative in this book. But a few disjointed vignettes picked out at random may help to convey some of the flavour of a memorable venture. The notes are as scribbled in my diary at the time, with a slight paraphrasing here and there for the sake of intelligibility.

25.v.45. Khela to Sosa (en route to Garbyang) for overnight and next day in Shri Narayanswamy's hospitable *ashram*, 8,300 ft, started in 1936….received kindly, shown over buildings, etc. still mostly under construction. Housed in thatched shed which serves as *dharamsala* for *sadhus* and others less holy, mostly *jatris* to and from Kailas. Narayanswamy a handsome youngish black-bearded long-haired man evidently 35–40 or so; speaks good English…a Kerala man from certain clues he let drop, e.g. 'yeggs' and his tell-tale accent on 'continuously'. He seems to know Raihana [Tyabji] well and apparently has some pull in Baroda which he often visits in winter fund-gathering tours

to the money-pots of Ahmedabad and elsewhere. At present he apparently has only two permanent associates, a holy man in an off-white 'nightgown' with dark ringlets and beard, looking like a decayed bandit—a Hur I thought—and a less holy retired schoolmaster from a neighbouring village who is the general manager of the establishment's worldly activities such as erecting buildings, obtaining food supplies (of the best) and making disbursements to staff and workmen. Was unsuccessful in drawing out the *swami* re. his past history and future aims. Place impresses me as a particularly good setting for a sanatorium—grand mountain surroundings and overlooking Nampa Glacier to E, but not particularly austere or reverence-provoking. Swami does not appear to be—perhaps he hides it effectively—either very learned or scholarly. Large portion of our conversation centred round the journey to Kailas (of which he claims to have made thirteen) and food. One thing we discovered was that the food they have is simple—but best ghee, best milk, best honey and best everything. So the ashram at least provides plenty of rest and wholesome food for the body. Of spiritual food, if any, we saw no trace except a tiny garret in his detached one-room *kutia*, a cabin in which the swami is said to meditate....The gardening part is managed by the 'ex bandit' and he does it very well with the help of Pocha's seeds and gardening catalogue, rattling off names of flowers as from *Index Kewensis*. Beautiful roses, pansies, poppies, calendulas, snapdragons and pinks now blooming. The snow has only lately gone and in another three weeks everything in this garden should be very lovely...according to the swami a large snake—about 18 inches thick (by show of hands)—dwells in a serpent grove on steep hillside above ashram, carrying *mani* on its forehead—like a bright shining star. Swami has seen it with his own eyes on dark nights at about 400 yards range. A local chap once saw it and came running to the ashram, laid himself down at the swami's feet and died. 'It was fright that did it.'

3 June 1945. Garbyang. A fine morning at last and so to Nampa Glacier *c.* 9 miles from here, guided by local tough of forbidding exterior called Gelong. Actually he is quite mild but a good and convincing mimic of a hardened bandit. Nampa lies in Nepal territory, but by some arrangement goats, sheep and cattle are allowed to be taken up there for pasture during the season just commencing. A bit too early as yet. Large areas or grazing meadows are immense snowfields, but already a good few goats and sheep busy on the herbage sprouting up as the snow melts. Azaleas: masses on hillsides just clear of snow; bushes *c.* 4 ft high with clusters of pale pinkish and purplish flowers, and leaves rather like rhododendron. Many other species of flowers including purple irises, buttercups and a mauve flower that grows in clusters (?) already covering considerable patches. In a fortnight the place will be one mass of colour. Glorious view of glacier and surrounding snow peaks.

5 June. Had conference at Nand Ram's 10 a.m. and fixed up the following for journey to Taklakot (first village in Tibet) starting tomorrow morning: Gelong, guide interpreter and general manager Rs 3 per day (without food) up to Gyanima; 6 ponies each to carry 50 seers at Rs 10 per pony up to Taklakot, with 2 attendants at Rs 4 each; 1 tent for kitchen and servants, hire up to Gyanima Rs 8. From Taklakot onwards baggage to go on yaks. Gelong to arrange. Plan roughly to reach Gyanima after doing Manasarovar and Kailas around 15 July.

6 June. Garbyang to Kalapani 12,000 ft… Temperature at 7 a.m. 39°F…Heavy downpour accompanied by thunder and lightning…. With every loud peal of thunder stones and boulders come hurtling down the overhanging cliffs. In places you are walking along a narrow ledge—the path—scarcely 3 ft wide with a roaring torrent several hundred feet sheer below on the other side…you wonder whether they are going to get you. It would be too bad if they do. But 'What to do, man!'.

8 June. Got up at 1 a.m. Took down and packed up tents and loaded ponies in pitch dark plus one candle and one flashlight torch. Sky ominously overcast. Started at 2.30. There is nothing that will answer to the name of path to Lipu. You just go stumbling and slipping over large stones and boulders that have slid down from the heights and thickly litter the ground. Unpleasant going in pitch darkness and how the pony men kept to the track is a wonder! You climb 3,250 ft from Shangchim to the head of the pass. Fresh soft snow made going difficult for the laden ponies. In places they sank in to the belly and were hauled out with trouble, one man tugging at the head rope and the other literally lifting it out by the tail. Deep clefts in the snow had frequently to be jumped, and serious accidents to ponies and baggage was quite on the cards. Quite a number of times the ponies had to be unloaded and the baggage carried over the bad bits. Exciting but slow work. Great credit to the pony men for boldness and initiative. Head of Lipu Lekh reached about 6.15: temperature 28°F. Heavy freshly fallen snow all over causing unusual delay to the opening of the pass for traffic. Goats and sheep seem to be the most satisfactory form of transport in such conditions. A large flock with laden panniers virtually whizzed past while we and ponies were floundering in the snow. I stood the march very badly, partly due to the altitude and load of sheepskin coat and bulging rucksack (18+ lbs) and partly to no sleep this night and the night before. Climbing over snow most distressing to wind and limb. Character of terrain changes abruptly on crossing the pass. Having trailed the

Kali up to its source on the Indian side, we descend following the Karnali down from its source on the Tibet side. Taklakot, the first Tibetan village *cis*-Lipu, a large and important seasonal *mandi* (closed in winter) for barter trade between India and Tibet. Halt for procuring yaks to replace the ponies which will return to Shangchim. Helped by Mohan Singh, a merchant from Dharchula with shop in the mandi; engaged a villainous-looking fellow named Lakpha, in coloured felt knee-boots and dirty *saya*-like robe with a belt round the middle, long greasy hair plaited in a pigtail, and rings in his ears. Hired his four yaks for our baggage each to carry 2 maunds (160 lb) at Rs 40 per yak for 30 days up to Gyanima, plus 30 per month for Lakpha (or Lappha) himself. Part of his job to keep us supplied with fuel, sticks or dried yak-dung for cooking.... Gompa or monastery on opposite hilltop (above Taklakot). Entertained by presiding lama, known as 'raja', to salted buttered tea (not at all bad!) and some sugar-coated gram. Raja apparently not too hard on himself: sleek, well-fed, with a variety of eatables within arm's reach without getting up from cushion, with young *brahmachari* [novitiate] in attendance. Tea in silver Tibetan cup in front and more in kettle in corner. Does not impress as being ascetic or scholarly, but *may* be both and more! Gompa a curious haphazard collection of 'jari-purana' bric-a-brac, including an odd assortment of atrociously stuffed moth-eaten, dust-laden, soot-begrimed animals, e.g. bear, leopard, wild yak, and horns of blackbuck and Schomburg's Deer hung from ceiling in adjoining room. This with a large admixture of prayer-wheels, prayer flags (perhaps obligingly supplied by Japan!) with some gilt and lacquer odds and ends. Afraid I am very little impressed, in fact rather depressed, at all this weird mumbo-jumbo that goes for religion, and at the blind faith that mankind has developed in things we imagine (why?) will bring salvation in the hereafter. Perhaps a little less dirt on themselves and in the immediate surroundings of the gompa (which function freely as an open latrine) would do more than all the prayer-wheels within the place whirling violently—on ball bearings if you like.

10.6.45...three of the frisky yaks refused to cross two sorry-looking wooden bridges in spite of much beating from back and tugging from fore. They scampered off and threw part of the load. The animals had to be unloaded at the two places, the baggage carried across by the men and reloaded on the other side. The yaks plunged in the icy water and swam across the strong current... I like the pace of the yaks, it just suits me: it is leisurely, and gives plenty of time for dawdling, observation and photography.... Bought two legs of sheep from chap carrying a slaughtered animal on a pony for Re 1. Good business for both parties. Am told last year a whole sheep cost only Rs 2½!... How to dress for a march is the great problem. Sun burning hot but it takes no time to become freezing (under fleeting cloud).

Sekang *11.vi.45*…at 3 p.m. the wind sprang up. This is our first experience of the real stuff which has made Tibet justly notorious. For the last 3½ hours the little tent is being battered and buffeted and in imminent danger of being blown off from above our heads. Luckily we have a spare 'kennel-for-two' type of tent for such an emergency, but let's hope we don't have to use it: it will be bad for nerves! 30°F during night. Canvas water-buckets frozen; very nearly also feet!… Stout Gelong has started praying loud and long every morning—rather alarmingly so!… The furze bushes are paradise for the birds and also for the birdnester. Could happily spend a week of field days here, but 'goodgood' things evidently also wait ahead, so must move on…. How I miss Wan Tho! With his energy and enthusiasm we could have worked wonders with bird photography.

13.vi.45 Sekang to Nayeze. At summit of pass (Gurla, 16,500 ft)—flat and wide enough for 200 Churchill tanks abreast—are many (votive) piles of stones collected by the pious and demon-fearing. The main pile is surmounted by the usual pole with every conceivable form of rubbish—rags, wisps of dirty wool, and horns and skulls of yaks, etc.—dangling from it. Lappha, evidently a demon-fearing chap, burst out into a volley of victorious chanting, mounted the pile and added his contribution to the junk. Gelong, though a Hindu, fears the devil none the less.

He also erupted in a series of pious grunts and chants which I hope the devil understood. We were warned by Khem Singh, for *our* good here and in the hereafter, that from the top of the pass one must always first look at 'rait shide', towards Manasarovar, and not to 'lep' towards Rakhas Tal. To do otherwise is disastrous…. Glorious and unbelievable views of both lakes with the icy dome of Kailas towering in the background. Extraordinary opalescent tints of Rakhas and changing shades of Manas according to time of day and state of sky—from almost snow-white through jade and emerald green to deepest ultramarine blue and purplish black: something to remember! Surface of Manasarovar 14,950 ft; circumference 54 miles; greatest depth according to Swami Pranavananda is *c.* 300 ft. Encircled by mountains of which only the peaks snow-capped at present.

It was near the Thugolho Monastery on the southern shore of Manasarovar that I first ran into Swami Pranavananda, a rational and science-oriented holy man with long experience of exploration in that region. We took to each other immediately, and had a long and interesting conversation on a purely physical plane—therefore in a language I could understand. I met Swami Pranavananda—again ran

into him—only after thirty-one years, in 1976, but this time in the very different setting of Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, when we were both receiving awards from the President of India, Shri Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed—he the Padma Bhushan and I its elder brother.

I like Lappha more and more. He is cheerful and obliging, but like Gelong prays too loud and long, commencing rather unnecessarily early a.m. Also when urging the laden yaks alongside he is incessantly groaning and chanting aloud something pious I presume, but by the nature of the job in hand it could well be otherwise!… Through open fly of tent, from flat on back and head on pillow, watched 8 pairs of Barheaded Geese together with several Brahminy Ducks grazing unconcernedly within 50 yards of tent at sunset. Delightful sight, but oh for a .22 and roast goose instead of the eternal dal and rice!

17.vi.45 Barkha (or Parkha). Plain along foot of Kailas range. An enormous bare flat (miles and miles in every direction) covered with small shingle and scanty scraggy grass. They say will develop into rich pastureland in a month's time. This is verily the Roof of the World and as a battlefield would have delighted the heart of Tamerlane and the warriors of old. Several major wars of ancient times could go on here simultaneously without coming in one another's way…. When I chased a Fat-tailed Lizard, Lappha, who is some species of Buddhist, admonished me saying that according to them killing one of these lizards is equivalent to a hundred murders. The lizard having taken to a desert life and renounced the good things of this world—eating, drinking and merrymaking—has become a swami or recluse. Therefore, killing it ranks with the murder of one sadhu = 100 ordinary mortals.

A scourge of rats once ate up all crops and started an epidemic of bubonic plague. A swami introduced cats as counterblast and fixed this 'exchange ratio' which remains stable under every kind of world crisis. Many troops and herds (one of over 70) of Kyang by shores of Rakhas Tal. Very wary: difficult to approach within 200 yards, often taking alarm and scampering off with much dust at much longer range. No young foals! What is the breeding season? Total seen today certainly over 300. Yaks delight in dry dung of wild ass, never failing to pick up and crunch a mouthful as they pass along…. Tarchan (or Darchan) 15,500 ft is a dreadful place for beggars. The official *parikrama* of Kailas starts from here, which explains it. We begin earning merit from tomorrow. Man's zeal and greed for merit in the hereafter is truly ridiculous and pathetic. Why can't he be satisfied with trying to gain merit in this one and only life which he can regulate, and leave the future (on which he has no control) to look after itself?… First leg [to Diraphuk] of official holy circuit [parikrama] of Kailas

On top of Lekh pass, 16,700 ft, W. Tibet, 1945

along a rough stony up-and-down footpath but well tamped down with the feet of faith and piety, aided maybe also by those of successful blackmarketeers. About a mile beyond Tarchan met two pathetic looking chaps in filthy rags and tatters—apparently Tibetan—who were busily doing the parikrama by the prostrating method. They stood up, clapped hands above their heads and threw themselves face down, hands extended forward in supplication, and so on and on to salvation. Poor chaps: I do hope they will not be done out of their hire at the other end!… Above this height (16,500 ft) must depend for fuel entirely on dry yak's dung. This assiduously gathered by eagle-eyed Lappha in the folds of his Tibetan robe all the way… It is good that one always has something to grouse about, but on the whole this is proving a very interesting ornithological experience. It should be of great help in giving the finishing touches to my *Birds of the Indian Hills*.… [Bivouac at Dirapukh]…though there it is, towering above us, Kailas certainly looks far more imposing from a great distance than from its bottom.… [second leg of parikrama] I tried hard to cheat by riding a yak [over the formidable Dolma La, 18,500 ft] but there was none to be had: at least this is what I was told by Lappha and Gelong. They were horrified at the idea of my hoping to acquire merit so cheaply, and seemed disgusted at the meanness of my nature in even thinking of such a subterfuge. Visited the local Gompa, one of the well known four on the holy circuit. Was nauseated by the

general atmosphere of squalor and filth and mumbo-jumbo humbug about the place. Is this really Buddhism or anything worth the name of religion?… Murderous business getting to top of Dolma La through deep soft snow. Completely done up. In distress by the time summit reached: could hardly do 50 steps before stopping to 'admire the view'. Laden yaks sinking in soft snow up to belly then frisking and bucking and throwing the baggage about! Descent on other side over enormous boulders, gradient often 1:2 or steeper. Nevertheless yaks seemed to feel all the merrier for it: extraordinary animals! Reached the next bivouac (Zunthulphuk) at 4.30 dead tired. Lay down in tent and philosophized over expeditions and the perversity of people who undertook them when they could be eating mangoes [then in season in India] and lying in dry, soft and comfortable beds instead of damp hard ground with pointed stones poking odd parts underneath. Expeditioners came off poorly!

25.vi.45. Ding Tso *c.* 15,200 ft a small lake *c.* 6 miles in circumference NE of Manasarovar. Considered by locals to be the head while Manasarovar is the body—therefore more holy. Its E shore most exciting ornithologically: a broad belt, in places ¼ mile wide, waterlogged bogland or tundra—a succession of green, spongy, rounded mounds or humps separated from one another by deepish water channels—a miniature archipelago in effect. Many of the 'islets' actually free-floating so that you had to be nippy and on your guard all the time lest the one you had stepped on went deep under before you could jump on to the next. Treacherous quicksands abounding, extra caution to be exercised. But this zone most promising and productive of good results with nesting birds. Great Crested Grebes, Brownheaded Gulls and about 15 pairs of Blacknecked Cranes around lake and obviously most breeding. Cranes' prancing and leaping dance very like Sarus: also voice and call, the latter slightly higher. One egg taken and scrambled; delicious—a welcome escape from the unchanging dal and rice!

While trying to reach a grebe's floating nest got into serious difficulties and imminent peril of getting swallowed up by quicksands. While on a floating mound at deepest part of bog suddenly realized, when down in icy water to thighs and sinking fast, that there was no other within jumping distance. Panicked wildly. Whipped round and made one desperate leap for last one which meanwhile had floated away further. By sheer luck only *just* made it. A lesson learnt; will heed Gelong's warnings more seriously hereafter!

Gelong, in spite of looks, turns out to be extremely afraid of dying before his time. All morning he was in mortal fear and co-operated as little as possible from a perfectly safe distance, taking no chances in this boggy habitat. He trembles at the distant sight of wayfarers whom he invariably suspects of being 'kharab admi' or bandits on the flimsiest of imaginary evidence. Yesterday he led

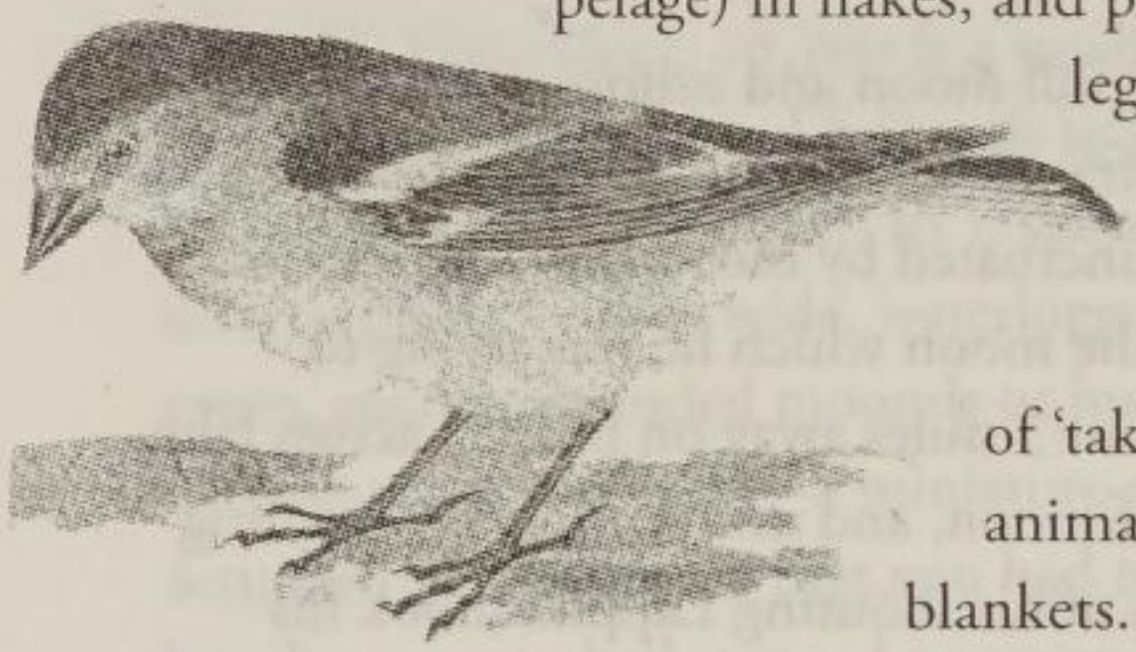
me a detour of miles (so I felt) to avoid what the rest of our party ascertained to be a family of perfectly harmless individuals from whom there was even a chance of buying some much coveted mutton with tact! (Learnt later that Gelong had good cause to be in constant dread of bandits—who infested the Manasarovar area—having had bitter experience not long before. He had been beaten up, gagged, robbed and thrown by the wayside until rescued by some chance passerby a couple of days later.)

…For the last 3 or 4 days the weather has been quite exceptionally fine, different to anything so far experienced on this trip. The air is champagne and one is never tired of chasing birds. It keeps light till 9 p.m. The sun is broiling hot but immediately a cloud comes over a sweater is welcome. This is the turning point of the trip. Tomorrow we begin working back towards Gyanima while evidently the Tibetan summer is only just beginning.

26.vi.45. Kyangma. Last night (Ding Tso) full moon and eclipse. Great excitement for Lappha and Gelong; both frantic with loud chanting to their respective makers, lasting over an hour, punctuated by blood-curdling shouts and threats to the Black One to let go of the moon which he was trying to swallow. Apparently lamas in a gompa about 3 miles away on hillside across lake also greatly perturbed at impending loss of moon, and much ghoulish shouting and firing of guns was heard. In the midst of his shouting Lappha shook his knife at the Black One, and this supreme threat no doubt persuaded him to release moon! Was glad to be able to sleep after the rescue…. Counted 119 in a herd of Kyang… Had visitation from a Jongpen, some sort of governor, on his way from Lhasa to Gyanima (where he is posted), with a band of ragamuffin hangers-on. He sat down on end of P's sleeping-bag, physically examined everything we possess—aneroid, compass, cameras, thermometers, rucksacks, aluminium mug, and of course binoculars—which were freely passed round with much enjoyment. Can't quite gauge the calibre of these gents called jongpens. Even if only of tahsildar status surely he can't have seen or heard of many of these things for the first time as without doubt he appeared to! He couldn't get over the needle pointing towards Kailas whichever way the compass was turned. Great merriment among the gangsters…. Snow finches of two species (Rednecked and Tibetan) nest in rat holes, apparently live together on friendly terms and with occupant mouse-hares. A rat and a finch seen to go down same hole!… Large herds of Kyang (one of over 100). The places they frequent have, from time to

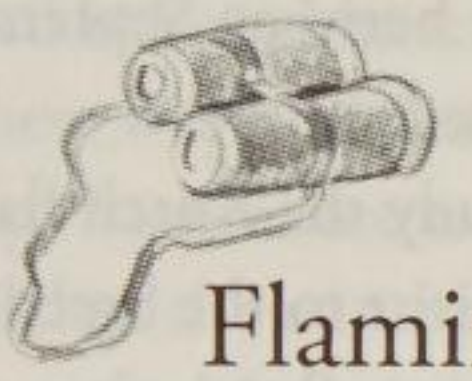
Rednecked Snow Finch

time (commonly) a drag mark in the sand, something like the track left by a snake, or by a frisky cow that has a log tied round its neck (to prevent it from straying). It is about 2 or 2½ inches broad and often up to 30 feet long (one over 90 feet), not straight but roughly wavy. Locals say it is made by an ass dragging one hoof; but why is the ass *such* an ass?! I wonder if these marks have been observed before and explained?… In the clear atmosphere of the boundless Barkha plain everything looks just across the way. But what a way it is! Miles and miles and miles you seem to get no nearer. It is tiresome work… Prescribed a mixture of *gur* and tsampa for a species of biscuit for tea. Result: the hardest and most waterproof type of reinforced concrete ever heard of in the toffee line. Fault of course Khem Singh's for getting the mixture wrong. Chewed a block like *supari* for over half hour then gave it up. Would do well as catapult ammunition!… Yak moults (from long-haired winter to short-haired summer pelage) in flakes, and patchily: neck and back first, belly and legs last when the season hots up. The belly hair has to be sheared as it does not flake off. The yakmen pull off flakes of hair and begin spinning yarn on a sort of 'takli' while marching alongside the laden animals. This yarn used for making tents and blankets. Black preferred to white as does not show dirt: fetches twice the price of white. Annual produce 1 kg+ per yak. Domestic bull and cow yak produce best quality hybrid 'jhibbu': fetches double the price of pure yak, which presently Rs 70 to 140 or so. Jhibbu much preferred generally as hardier and more docile and tractable. Can be put to plough. Although superiority of jhibbu generally recognized, still not bred by everybody as considered unnatural and immoral practice, bringing bad luck. So only the wicked prosper! Yak refuses to enter shed or stable just as it refuses to go over bridge. Produces a single young per year. Gestation 9 months: calfs in spring. Normal life 18–21 years. Full strength at 4 years…. When arriving at the stone pile that marks the head of every pass, the yakmen jump and prance about frantically, yelling 'So..so..so..so..' in prescribed rhythm, 'So' apparently being some species of deity. When asked why he did not yell when crossing a minor pass, Lappha said he didn't care for minor deities with whom he can argue and quarrel on more or less equal terms. He only respected the major gods who needed to be kept on the right side of. (The Dreamer whose dreams come true?) Have not been able to make out at all whether the people here take religion seriously or as a joke. Superstition, black magic and devils of numerous species certainly keep them in fear and trembling, but about the rest?… The shops in the mandis [Taklakot, Gyanima, Dharchula, *et al.*] carry an extraordinary



Tibetan Snow Finch

assortment of stock-in-trade: cloth, cast-off woollens of every description, electric torches, new and secondhand army boots and plimsolls, tea from Lhasa and Berinag, sugar (*misri*), hurricane lanterns, safety-pins and miscellaneous improbable items requiring great ingenuity and imagination to muster. The shopkeepers also carry on barter, trading various articles with sheep's wool, furs, borax, etc. Was shown 2 or 3 beautiful Snow Lynx skins, rough cured but not mangled, obtained by barter. Jaman Singh of Dharchula sells them to a merchant in Peshawar for Rs 130 or thereabouts each.



Flamingo City

Among the Indian princes and princelings whom I had opportunities of knowing a little more intimately than others—chiefly on a naturalist's plane—was Maharao Vijayarajji of Kutch. He was over sixty when he came to the *gaddi*, having been on a patient and seemingly unending probation as *Yuvraj* for forty years or more, thanks to the robust good health of his father, Maharao Khengarji, who had come to be regarded by two generations of his loyal subjects as an ancient, indestructible monument of Kutch. Both father and son were keen sportsmen and knowledgeable naturalists, the former as a hunter of big game, the latter particularly interested in birds—game as well as in general.

I first became acquainted with Maharao Vijayarajji in 1942, soon after he, at long last, ascended the gaddi. By then he had lost some of his youthful vigour and assumed a comfortable, portly shape, abetted by lack of exercise forced by an injury to his knee. Though having to cut down on shikar jaunts needing physical exertion and mobility, he still retained an enviable expertise in small-game shooting and a lively interest in watching birds, especially of his own state. Thus it was at his invitation and under his generous sponsorship that I undertook a field survey of the bird life of his fascinating state with a view to producing for him an illustrated book on the birds of Kutch on the lines of my *Book of Indian Birds*, which had caught his fancy.

Kutch is a chronically drought-prone area, and a succession of bad monsoons will often inhibit breeding of the flamingos for two or three

years. The birds need an optimum depth of six to eight inches of shallow inundation on their breeding ground to generate their mound-building activities. If the monsoon has failed or been deficient, this depth is never attained on the nest site. In that case the water leaves the site high and dry before September or October, when the normal breeding season should commence. If the monsoon has been heavy, as in 1944, the water on the site is too deep, and may take a long time to dry to the acceptable depth. Hence, unlike most nesting grounds in Asia, and in Europe, Africa and the New World, the season in Kutch is a moveable feast and unpredictable—it may range anywhere between September/October and March/April or be completely suppressed.

Knowing my special keenness to study the Kutch flamingo and the disappointments I had had on earlier visits to the breeding grounds, the Maharao had a special lookout kept on flamingo movements in the Great Rann. That is how I received an express telegram from him one day in April 1945 while I was in the midst of hectic preparations in Bombay for the birding 'pilgrimage' to Kailas and Manasarovar the following month. The breeding colony—'Flamingo City'—was then at the peak of its activities and I was urged to come immediately. This long-awaited opportunity, coming even at such an awkward moment, was too good to miss. I arrived in Bhuj by air two days later.

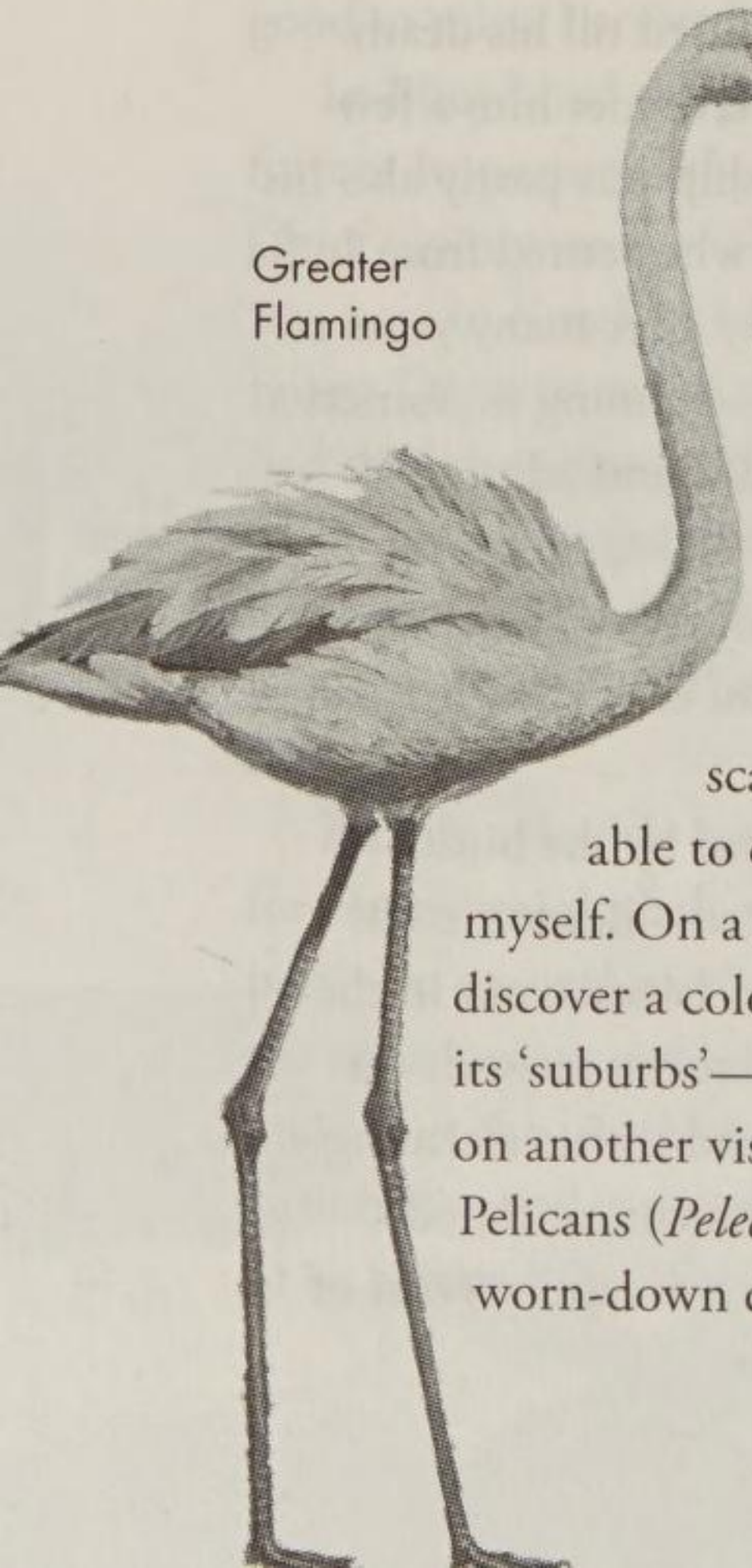
In Bhuj I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Peter Clutterbuck, a former Inspector-General of Forests in India who had done a stint as Chief Conservator of Forests in Kashmir State after retirement, and was now in Kutch at Maharao Vijayarajji's invitation to reorganize the Forest Department of the state. Throughout his Indian service, Sir Peter had the reputation of being an exceptionally able forest officer and a dedicated naturalist and conservationist. Though no longer young, he had expressed to the Maharao a keen desire to visit Flamingo City along with me, in spite of the summer heat and physical hardships involved in the journey.

A fairly sybaritic tented camp had been set up by the Kutch durbar for our overnight halt at Nir, which was reached from Bhuj via Khavda, partly by car and partly on camelback (about seventy miles). I recall the acrimonious political key on which my relationship with Sir Peter opened at the tête-à-tête dinner that night—damask tablecloth, silver cutlery, liveried waiters! The years of the World War and the decade or so before, with Mahatma Gandhi and the Satyagraha Movement in

operation, had embittered relations between Indians and the British to an unprecedented degree. All the British in India—government servants high and low, as well as the boxwallahs—were scandalized and almost foaming at the mouth over the 'subversive' preachings and mischief of that 'seditionist rat Gandhi', as Meinertzhagen had called him, and his traitorous henchman Nehru, even after the correct education he had received at Harrow and Cambridge. Earlier in the evening Sir Peter had thus gratuitously started unburdening himself on the subject, and now gave me an unprovoked broadside of the pent-up venom of his spleen. As I have confessed before, I have never been famous for the sweetness of my temper, and here was sufficient provocation for jettisoning restraint. I am afraid perhaps I said more nasty things than the occasion called for, but it did help to clear the atmosphere between Sir Peter Clutterbuck and myself for ever after. I made it plain to him that I had no wish or intention to convert him from his firm convictions, nor would it be worth his while to try to change my views—and that was that; we both had a deep common interest in birds and wildlife, so why not confine ourselves to those topics and leave politics to the politicians? After this first unfortunate but decisive confrontation, I found Sir Peter a singularly charming and delightful companion, and the friendship and mutual regard generated on that flamingo trip endured till his death in about 1958 in England, where I was happy to have met him a few months earlier. The catalyst in our bond of friendship was partly also his doting son Brigadier J.E. (Jack) Clutterbuck, RE, who retired from India in 1948 as Chief Engineer of the then GIP Railway after many years of meritorious service, to start a new life in England—farming in Somerset. Jack was to me a kindred spirit, an altogether lovable and admirable character, mad about the Indian jungles where we had spent many happy days together from time to time camping, shooting, trekking and naturalizing. He was one of my closet and most cherished English friends.

The traditional Flamingo City—the same as used by the birds year after year at least since 1896 when first reported—lies some 10 kilometres north-east of Nir (at the tip of Pachham Island), out in the pancake-flat featureless Rann. To reach the place one has to wade on foot or ride on local ponies or camels which skid and slither alarmingly through the ankle- to thigh-deep water, more or less concentrated brine, of over-soft, slippery slush often overlaid by a deceptive crust of

razor-sharp salt crystals like splintered glass. Under the intense desert sun it produces the blinding glare of freshly fallen snow. The fetlocks of the ponies sometimes get badly lacerated as the hoofs sink through the crunchy surface. Thankfully, the April heat felt less oppressive than the 45°C+ shown by the thermometer, because a cool breeze blew throughout the day and even made a cotton coverlet distinctly welcome at night in our open-to-sky bivouac. This was, and still remains, the only occasion it was possible to make a fairly accurate physical count of the population of Flamingo City in a peak breeding year, and to observe something of the nocturnal movements and behaviour of the birds, for it was a period of brilliant moonlight with a clear sky and optimal conditions. However, the lack of fresh water at the site, and of fuel for cooking and fodder of any kind for the riding and draft animals, made a longer stay than our two nights 'on location' impossible. This would necessitate elaborate and carefully planned previous bandobast. After measuring out the total area of the colony on the ground and randomly demarcating several 'built up' sample plots of about 90 × 90 metres each, and allowing for the bald (unbuilt) patches in between the nest clusters, I calculated the total number of occupied nests in the 'city' to be 1,04,758. On the basis of this figure, and taking two adults to each nest and two young to every three nests, plus the hordes of non-breeding adults and sub-adults around the colony, the total population would probably be of the order of half a million birds. This would undoubtedly make Flamingo City the largest breeding colony of the Greater Flamingo in Asia, and at least *one* of the largest in the world. I have long realized the potential of the Great Rann of Kutch as an area for biological surprises, justifying a full-scale scientific exploration, and regretted not being able to carry out a more thorough and extensive survey myself. On a subsequent visit to Flamingo City I was lucky to discover a colony of Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) breeding in its 'suburbs'—the first ever record for the subcontinent—and on another visit a few years later a nesting colony of Rosy Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)—also the first—among the worn-down disused flamingo nests on the periphery.



Greater Flamingo

To make doubly sure that the camera he had lent me (to replace mine which had developed a last-minute hitch) behaved as it should in my hands, Maharao Vijayarajji had considerately sent out from Bhuj the state photographer, Ali Mohammad, with complete paraphernalia and a special assistant, whose function was not immediately apparent. The two photographers and their equipment made up two complete camel loads. The vintage apparatus—full-plate studio camera of solid teakwood, enormous proportions and cumbrousness—looked like some antique piece of furniture from the period of William the Conqueror or thereabouts. It was obviously a camera with a history, and quite believably the same as made the original picture published in the *Journal* of the BNHS by Maharao Khengarji in 1896 giving positive evidence of flamingos breeding in the Rann. The apparatus not only needed two able-bodied men to rig it up for action on its massive wooden tripod, but also for its complicated co-operative operation. It was worked like a ship, and this is where the trained assistant became indispensable. The chief photographer (the Captain) had to enshroud his head in yards of black cloth, eyes glued to the focusing screen. From this position—the 'bridge'—he signalled orders down to the 'engine room', as it were, to the assistant in front, to twiddle the focusing knob a trifle this way or that to get the correct focus. The focusing knob was out of reach of the Captain himself and only a specially trained assistant could assist. The camera erected at the nest colony, 'on location', showed up from afar in the vast expanse as a fair-sized house, and, when a wind sprang up and the black shroud round the Captain's head began to flutter and flap, I thought there could be no earthly chance of getting any photographs of the birds. I am afraid at that point I also became rather uncharitably facetious at the Captain's expense, but he bore it all with surprising good humour. It was not until we got back to Bhuj and he produced the most unexpectedly good results from his dark room that I realized the laugh had really been on me, and that it needs something more than a good camera to produce a good photograph.

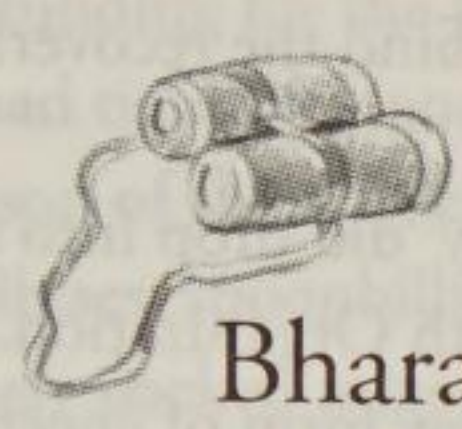
An edition of 1,000 copies of *The Birds of Kutch* with twenty colour plates by D.V. Cowen, fully funded by the Kutch durbar, was published

Rosy Pelican

by Oxford University Press for the Government of Kutch in 1945, under severe wartime constraints. It was acclaimed by reviewers in India and abroad. Five hundred copies of the book were retained by the Maharao for presentation to his state guests. Unfortunately, these copies were carelessly stored in a damp cellar where most were destroyed by white ants. The publication was priced at a nominal Rs 20 per copy and the edition was soon exhausted, second-hand copies fetching up to $100 thereafter.

In 1945, R.I. Pocock, who was revising the Mammalia volumes of the *Fauna of British India* series, wrote to the BNHS asking whether it could arrange to obtain a few fresh specimens of the Kutch wild ass for critical study, since adequate material was lacking in the British Museum (Natural History). Maharao Vijayarajji, with his accustomed generosity, offered to provide all facilities to the Society for a collecting expedition in the Little Rann, which is the stronghold of this animal. I was doing the bird survey of Gujarat at the time (March 1946) and was glad to avail of the opportunity for a closer acquaintance with this rare and interesting animal, the ecology and biology of which was so little known. It would also give me a chance to investigate the birds of the Little Rann which I had missed during the Kutch survey, and long suspected to be the only breeding ground of the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) in the Indian region.

The trip proved highly rewarding from the ornithological angle. We fortuitously struck a vast open expanse of shallow brackish water in the debouchment of the Banas river into the Rann, where there was a heavier concentration of migratory ducks, waders and other birds than I had ever seen before or have since—duck by the million darkening the water for miles, the majority apparently Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) with a sprinkling of hordes of Shovellers (*Spatula clypeata*), and doubtless many other species not distinguishable in the distance. Besides these, there were some eighty Rosy Pelicans and three to five lakh Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) (*no* Greater), countless thousands of sandpipers, stints, redshanks, greenshanks and others; also thousands of Common and Demoiselle Cranes, all apparently collecting for the outward migration. Unfortunately I never had a chance to visit this place at the proper time again.

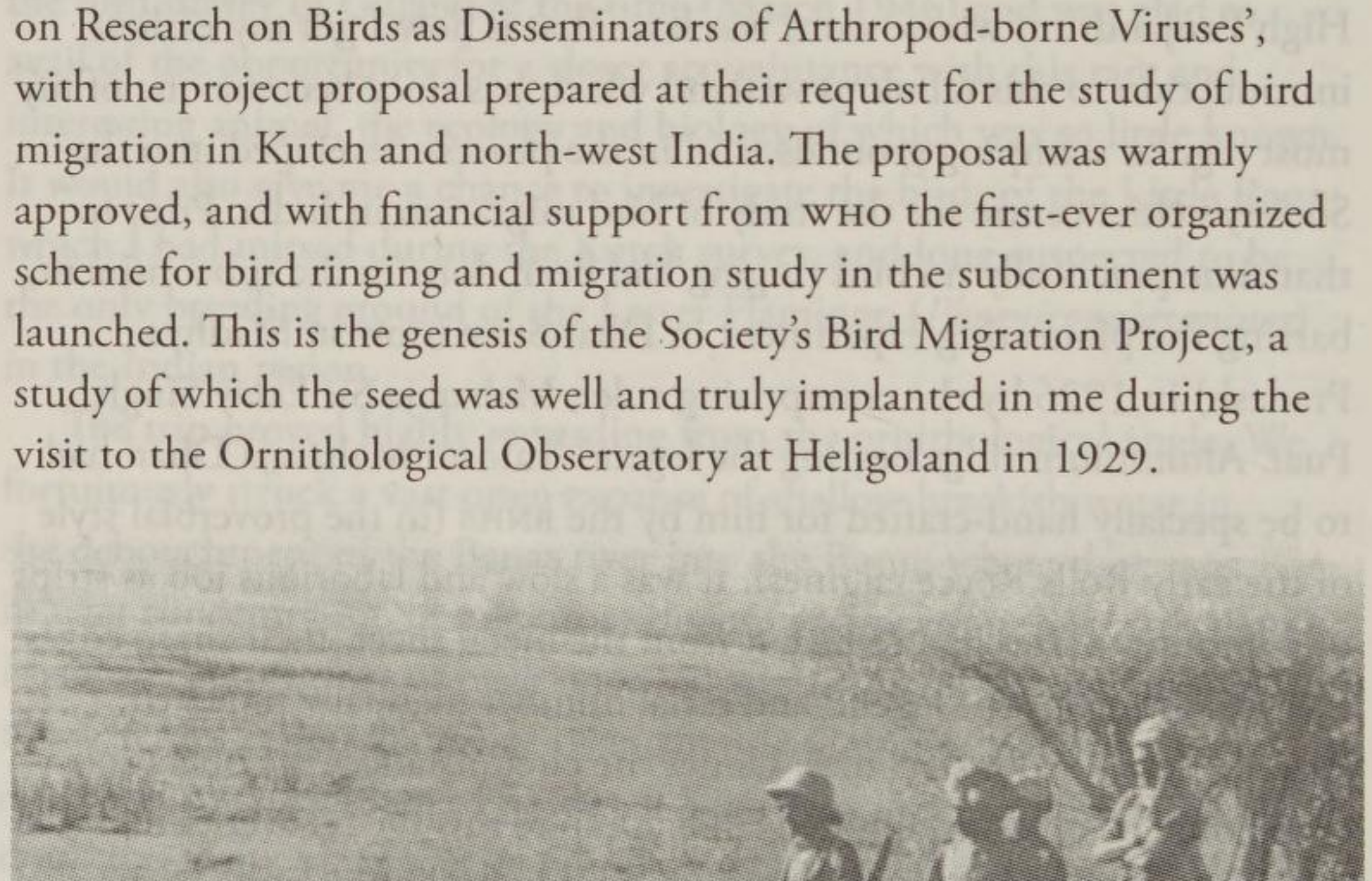


Bharatpur

Before 1935 I only knew the 'Ghana' of Bharatpur by its reputation as a phenomenal private duck-shooting reserve of the maharajas and their elite VIP guests. That year, at my bidding, my friend Prater, Curator of the BNHS, wrote to Sir Richard Tottenham, ICS, a keen naturalist-sportsman member of the Society, to enquire what facilities would be available from the state for setting up a pilot wildfowl ringing centre at the famous Keoladeo Ghana *jheel*. Sir Richard was the Administrator of the state during the minority of Maharaja Brijendra Singh, and the High Panjandrum whose word was law. That is how I got my earliest introduction to this fabulous wetland which has since become one of my most regular stamping grounds, and in the process developed into the Society's chief centre for the study of bird migration in India. Prior to that time practically no bird ringing had been done in the subcontinent, barring the pioneering experiment in Dhar State (now in Madhya Pradesh) in 1926 by the enterprising ruler, Maharaja Sir Uday Singh Puar. Aluminium rings bearing the legend 'Inform Maharaja Dhar' had to be specially hand-crafted for him by the BNHS (in the proverbial style of the early Rolls Royce engines). It was a slow and laborious job as strips of appropriate sizes had to be cut from the metal sheet, their sharp edges filed smooth, and the legend and serial number manually punched, letter by letter, from steel dies. Under the circumstances the operation could only be on a very limited scale. Despite this the recoveries reported from such distant places as Turkestan, Siberia, and other parts of the USSR were so exciting and encouraging that I was determined to have the BNHS take up bird ringing as one of its major field activities if and when funds and facilities ever made it possible. Using the Dhar success as a lure the Society was able, through the good offices of some of its civilian members in the Sind administration, then a part of Bombay Presidency, to persuade a handful of affluent sporting zamindars to take up the ringing of migratory ducks. But here again the bottleneck was the ring supply. Rings marked 'Inform Bombay Nat. Hist. Society' had still to be manually prepared and were sparingly available. In spite of the modest

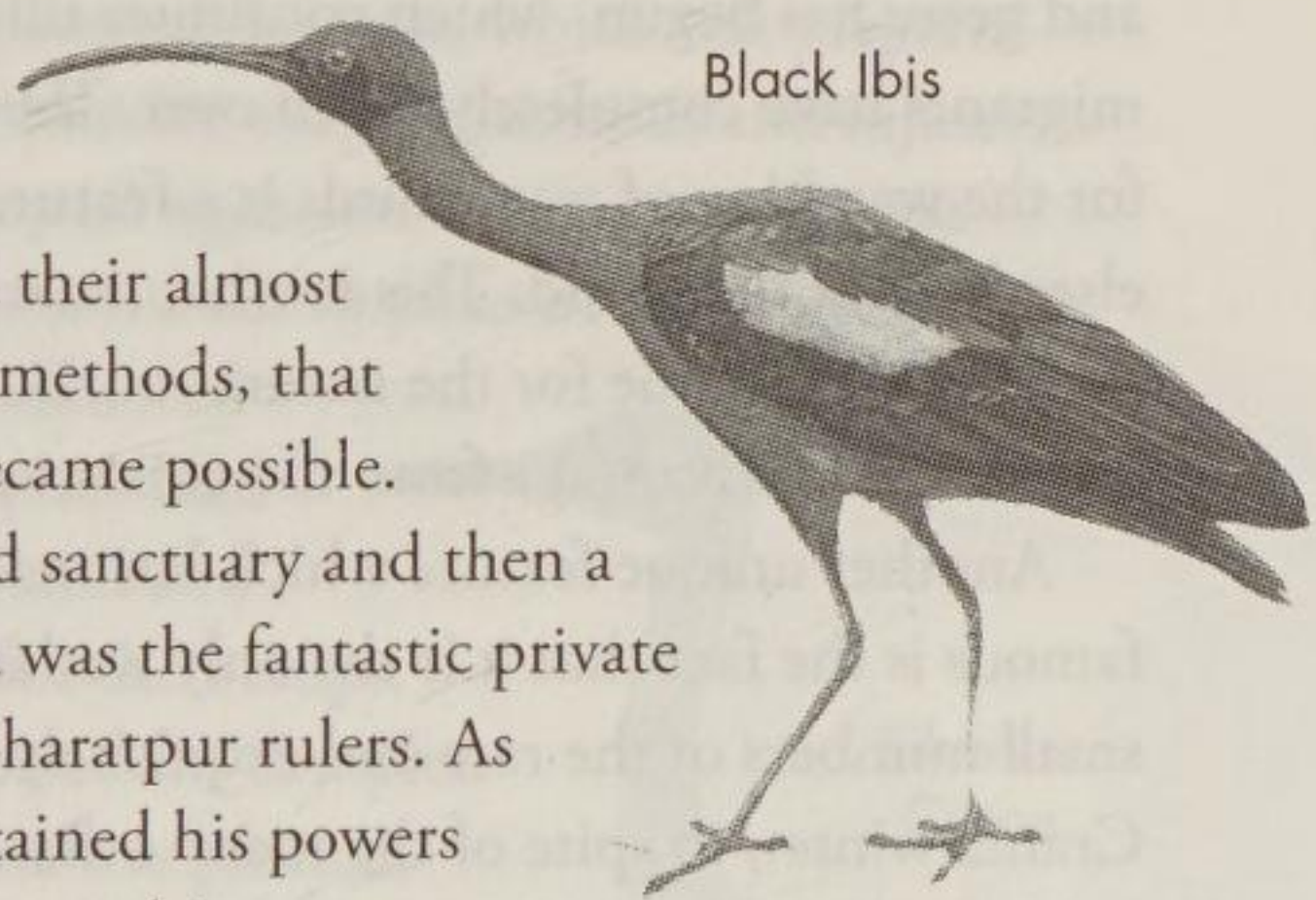
scale on which ringing was done in Sind the recoveries were gratifying beyond expectation.

It was a long wait, but 'possibility' did drop into our lap fortuitously and unsolicited, via the World Health Organization. Around the year 1957 there erupted an apparently new form of encephalitis in the Kyasanur forest area of Karnataka (South India), affecting villagers and monkeys, sometimes fatally. The tick-borne virus of this encephalitis (known as 'Monkey Disease' or KFD) was reported by the Virus Research Centre, Pune, to be closely related to Omsk Haemorrhagic Fever and the Russian Spring-Summer Encephalitis (RSSE) complex. The apparently transcontinental distribution of the virus suggested that it could have reached here through the agency of ticks on birds migrating between USSR and India, and the WHO seriously seized upon the problem. In March 1959 I was invited to a meeting in Geneva of a 'Scientific Group on Research on Birds as Disseminators of Arthropod-borne Viruses', with the project proposal prepared at their request for the study of bird migration in Kutch and north-west India. The proposal was warmly approved, and with financial support from WHO the first-ever organized scheme for bird ringing and migration study in the subcontinent was launched. This is the genesis of the Society's Bird Migration Project, a study of which the seed was well and truly implanted in me during the visit to the Ornithological Observatory at Heligoland in 1929.



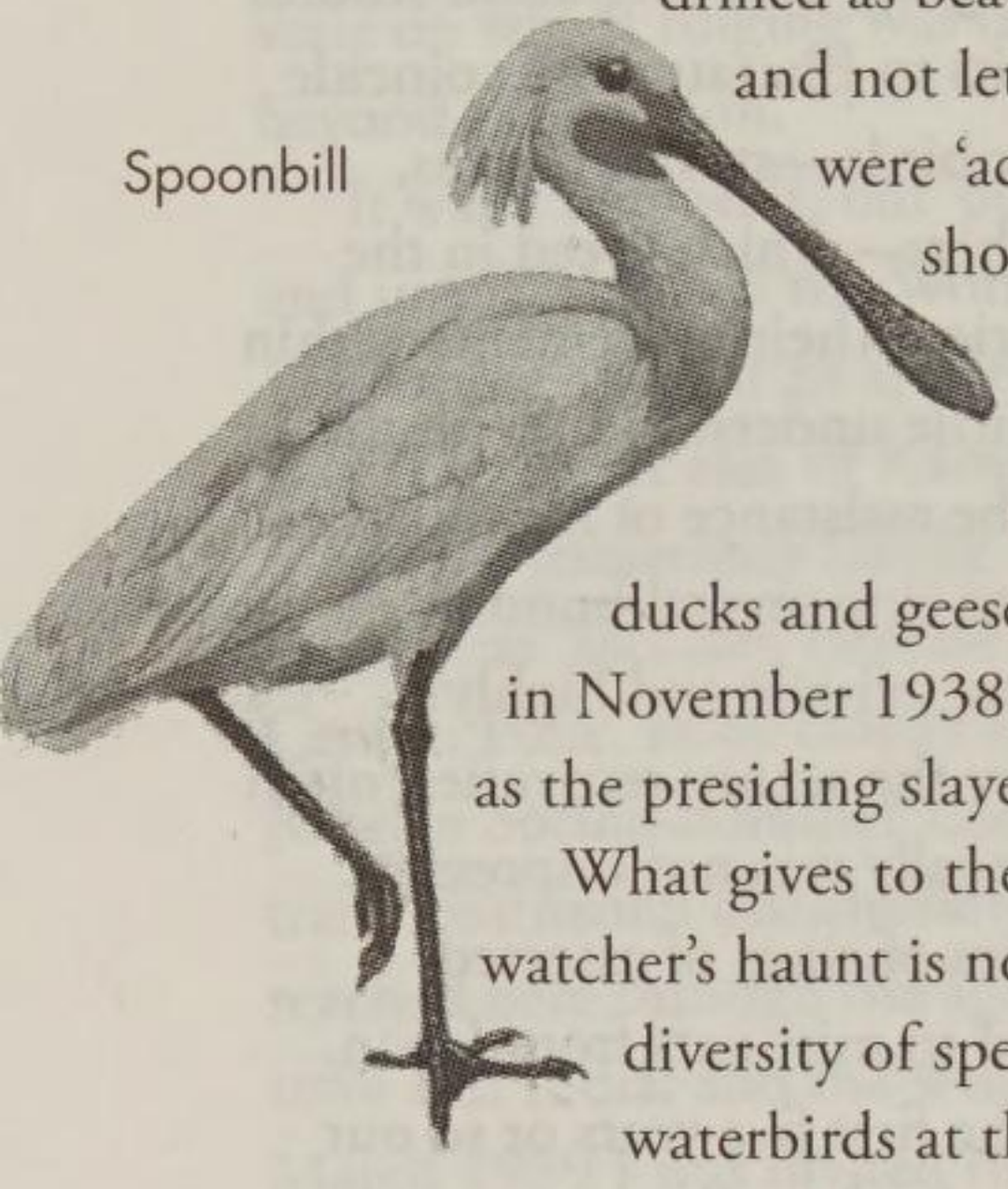
At the Ghana, Bharatpur, March 1937

Before the WHO funding for the BNHS's regular bird migration studies became available I had timed my annual visits to Bharatpur to coincide with the nesting season of the resident water birds—storks, herons, egrets, cormorants, ibises, spoonbills and others—which breed in the Ghana in such densely packed mixed heronries. Their movements within the country, and of some even beyond, are little understood. With the friendly co-operation of the Maharaja and the assistance of his shikaris and game guards, I had managed each year to ring several hundred nestlings with our hand-punched rings. Some tell-tale and highly interesting information was provided even by the scanty recoveries, often at unexpectedly distant places. Naturally the tally was not impressive. It was only after we had access to free supplies of rings of assorted sizes from specialist suppliers in Sweden, and to mist nets from Japan, that large-scale ringing got under way. For the first five years or so our attention was mostly confined to land birds, chiefly gallinaceous and passerine, specially the ground feeding forms—the potential hosts of ticks. Serious duck ringing could only be taken up much later, because the locals at Bharatpur and in the other localities of operation were unskilled in catching ducks and other waterfowl in a sufficiently big way. It was only after our discovery of the expert Bihari professional trappers of the Sahni and Mirshikar tribes, and their almost disastrously successful catching methods, that large-scale water bird ringing became possible.



Black Ibis

Before it became a water bird sanctuary and then a National Park, Keoladeo Ghana was the fantastic private duck-shooting preserve of the Bharatpur rulers. As long as the present Maharaja retained his powers there was no question or thought on his part of voluntarily giving up his shooting rights and converting it into a sanctuary. Apart from his casual shooting of a few ducks for sport and the table, he traditionally used to lay on three or four big shoots every season to which all sorts of VIPs and some less than V were invited—viceroys, governors, top civil and military brass, and brother princes from other states. Numbered butts were allotted to the guns, distributed in strategic spots all over the lake. The whole operation worked with the mechanical precision of an army manoeuvre, with men of the state forces



Spoonbill

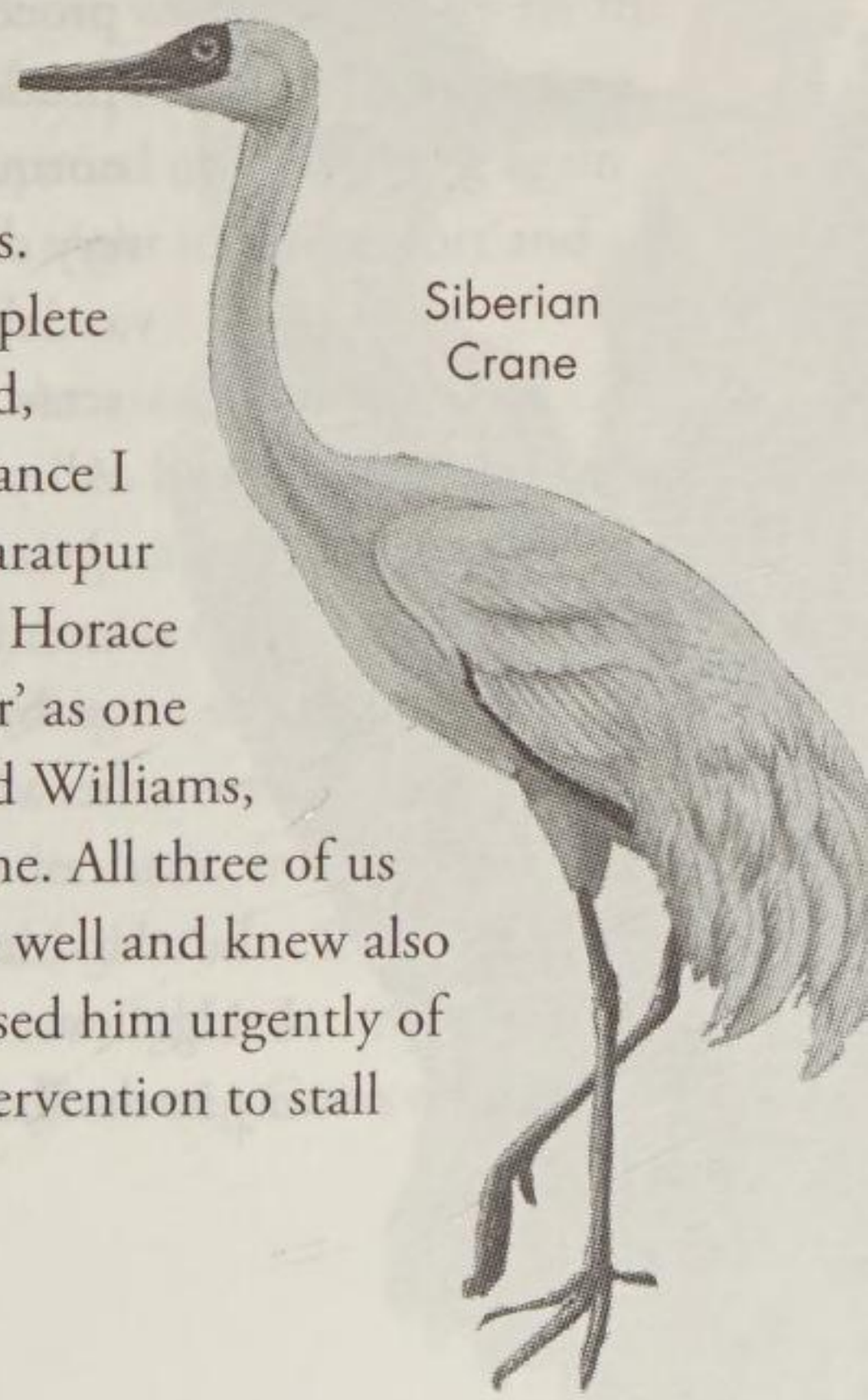
drilled as beaters to keep the birds moving over the guns and not letting them settle. Enormous holocausts were 'accomplished' at some of these gargantuan shoots, and there are several records of two to three thousand birds killed in a single day, and three records even of over four thousand. The all-time record bag of 4,273 ducks and geese to 38 guns for Keoladeo Ghana was made in November 1938, with Lord Linlithgow, the ruling viceroy, as the presiding slayer.

What gives to the Ghana its unique distinction as a bird-watcher's haunt is not only the fantastic concentration and diversity of species of both resident and migratory waterbirds at the appropriate seasons, but the uncommonly extended period of half a year or more at a stretch over which bird-watching can be enjoyed here. In a season of normal monsoon, residents such as storks, egrets, cormorants, etc. commence breeding in August. By November, before the parents and young have evacuated the heronries, the influx of the migrant ducks and geese has begun, which continues till end-November, by when the migrants have completely taken over. The prolonged unbroken period for the watching of water birds is a feature which is perhaps unequalled elsewhere in the world. This is what makes Keoladeo National Park such an ideal venue for the nature tourist and bird photographer—a questionable advantage from the conservation point of view!

Another unique feature which has made Keoladeo Ghana world famous is the fact that it is the only wetland in the subcontinent where small numbers of the rare and exquisitely beautiful snow-white Siberian Cranes winter, in spite of the many other superficially identical wetland habitats with which Uttar Pradesh and the Indo-Gangetic Plain are studded. Whether it is some special food item not found in the other jheels that restricts the bird to Keoladeo, or what, is not known. And since the species is now included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 (Totally Protected) it is unlikely we shall ever get to know this from examination of stomach contents. My first meeting with the Siberian Crane occurred in 1937 when collecting mallophaga (feather lice) at Keoladeo with Meinertzhagen for his special study. A flock of eleven birds had arrived, of which I shot one. The bird,

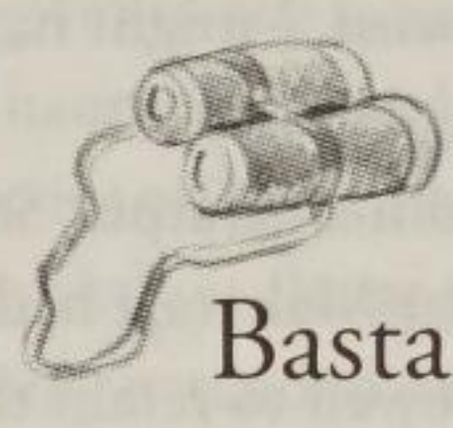
unfortunately, had no mallophaga on it, but we preserved its stomach contents, which consisted almost exclusively of the corms of Cyperus grass, of which several species occur in the wetland. These were to be identified specifically at Kew, but the identification somehow never got done. Thus, whether or not the bird is so choosy about its winter habitat due to the food factor remains a mystery. We were also collecting mallophaga from raptors (birds of prey) at the same time, and a note in Meinertzhagen's diary indicates how dramatically the population of this group of birds had declined in the interval since then. The entry reads: 'Bharatpur, 2.3.1937. After breakfast shot 2 Spotted, 2 Pallas's, 2 Imperial, 1 Tawny, 1 *Spilornis*, 1 *Circaetus*. I might have shot a dozen of each if I had wished to.' It is surprising he didn't!

In the deed of transfer of power from Bharatpur State to the Centre at the time of India's Independence, the Maharaja had insisted on inserting a clause that he would be allowed to retain the exclusive right of shooting in the Ghana for himself and his friends. In view of other more important issues involved, this concession was readily conceded by the government. However, the Maharaja's policy of continuing to shoot while denying this privilege to the general public was deeply resented by the powerful anti-maharaja party of the state, which was prepared to go to great lengths to punish him for alleged misdeeds and injustices in the past. They had whipped up an agitation alleging that he was holding on to the Ghana solely for his selfish pleasure and to entertain influential friends at court in Delhi, and thereby wickedly depriving the poor land-starved ryots of good cultivable land and the water they so badly needed for their crops. With the backing of crooked politicians complete physical devastation of the Ghana was plotted, and indeed was imminent, when quite by chance I got wind of the plot. I happened to be at Bharatpur then with two eminent ornithologist friends, Horace Alexander, the well-known Quaker ('Quacker' as one newspaper spelled it), and General Sir Harold Williams, Chief Engineer of the Indian Army at the time. All three of us knew Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru quite well and knew also of his deep personal love of nature. We apprised him urgently of what was afoot and craved his immediate intervention to stall



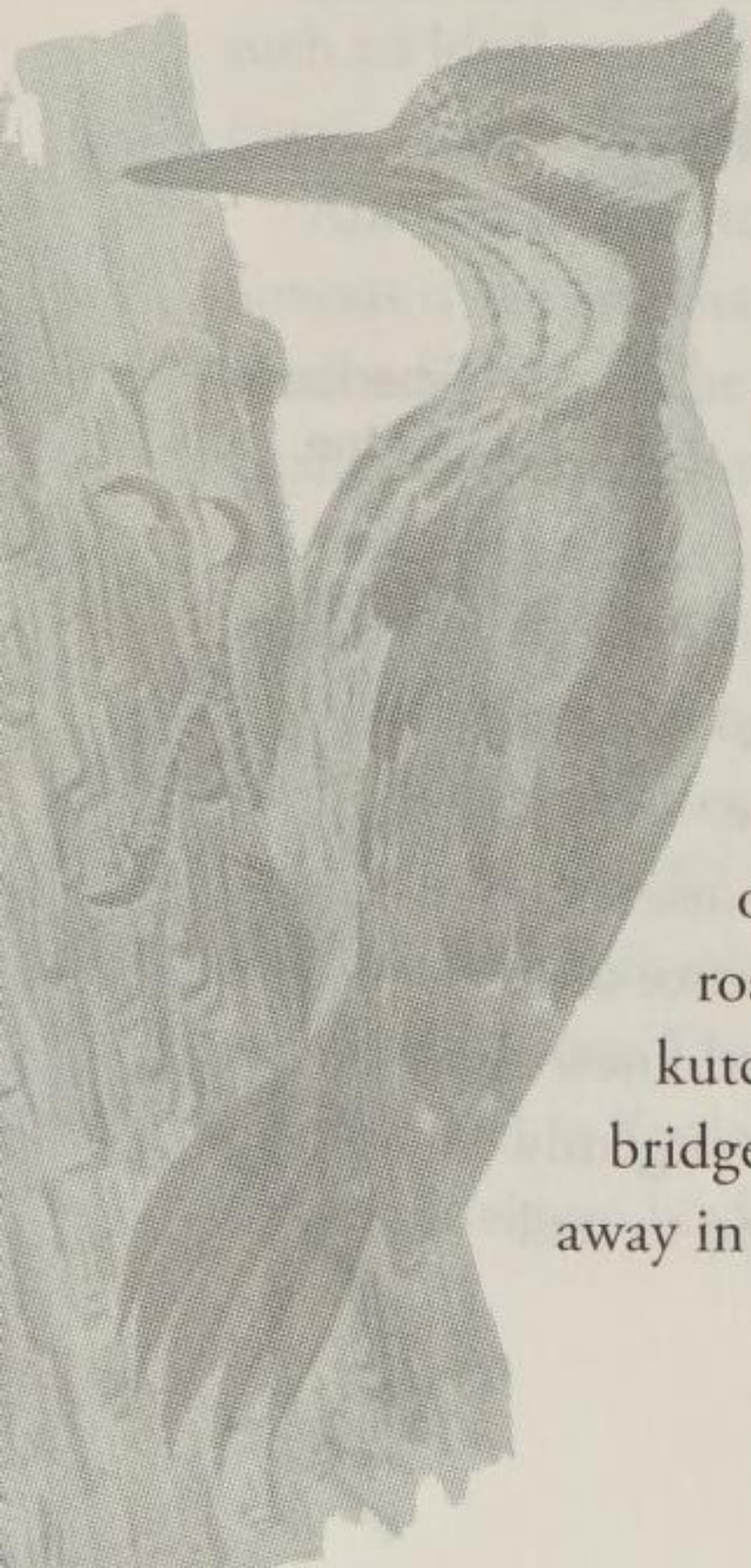
Siberian Crane

the vandalism. And it was Jawaharlal's prompt and positive response that saved the teetering Ghana from the brink. Through Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, his energetic and sympathetic Minister of Agriculture & Irrigation, he had the charges of deprivation of land and water examined and reconciled by experts of his ministry to the satisfaction of all concerned. And in due course the headstrong Maharaja was coaxed and morally pressurized into surrendering his shooting rights. Thus was the Ghana saved from certain annihilation, and it stands today as one of the world's most fabulous waterfowl resorts.



Bastar 1949

Bastar and Kanker were two of the tribal states in the Eastern States Agency under the Raj, in an area that was little known biologically up to the time of my bird survey in 1949, and therefore a specially tantalizing blank for the field naturalist. Two years after India's Independence the rajas were still on the gaddis which had become decidedly shaky in the uncertainty of their future. It was still very wild country and comparatively unaffected by the processes of 'civilization', 'development' and prudery against female toplessness which was the normal tribal regime. Happily, Bastar then was a very different place from what it has since become vandalized into, especially after the Japanese got scent of the vast iron ore deposits of Bailadila. All-year motorable roads, dusty and untarred, were few and far between, and of a strictly arterial nature. Most of the communication was by a scanty and irregular private bus service, otherwise by bullock cart, over fair-weather forest roads or rutted cross-country tracks that were really kutcha, including the straw-and-bamboo makeshift bridges over the forest streams which often got washed away in the flash floods of the monsoon. Except for a few



tired army disposal jeeps, four-wheel-drive vehicles were unavailable. When the water in the streams was low, the Loke station-wagon often got stuck in the loose sand bordering them or sunk down to the footboards in mid-stream, whence it had to be pushed and hauled out by manpower if available—usually timber cartmen stranded in like cases. After bitter experience of this sort I learnt to carry with me as standard equipment on the wagon a couple of shovels and a roll of chicken wire-netting to spread over the sand and prevent the wheels from churning in. It saved us many an unpleasant hour of fruitless scouting for help. Another unpleasant experience taught me to carry a bicycle, by way of a life-boat, strapped in special brackets on the roof of the vehicle.

It happened one afternoon while driving between a largish village called Geedam, and Jagdalpur, the capital of Bastar State, that in negotiating a particularly bad stretch of road with more than thirty kilometres still to go, the axle gave way and one of the back wheels flew off, dragging the lopsided truck almost into a roadside ditch. A single bus belonging to a local operator used to shuttle past this spot once every alternate day. We had met it going in the opposite direction earlier that morning, so expected that as per schedule it would return on the morrow. It was now late in the afternoon and the only thing to do was to unload the vehicle and set up a bivouac in a nearby open plot, make ourselves at home for the night and hope for the bus to return next morning. After breakfast the beddings, camp cots, cooking utensils, buckets, lanterns and everything else were hurriedly repacked while we waited patiently for the bus to turn up. When there was no bus in either direction by sunset we knew that something had gone wrong and opened up everything again and resigned ourselves to spending one more night in discomfort and some anxiety.

A man-eating tiger had been reported in the area, on account of which all the bullock-cart traffic had also come to be suspended for over a week. The process of unpacking in the evening and repacking next morning and waiting patiently was repeated, but as there was still no bus in either direction till dusk, no means of sending an SOS to Jagdalpur, and the prospect of the same uncertainty on the morrow, I decided to leave the gypsy camp in care of Gabriel and the cook, and foot-slog to Jagdalpur when it got a little cooler after midnight. So at 2 o'clock next morning, taking advantage of the brilliant moonlight, accompanied by the second skinner, Anthony DeSouza (a tough young Goan refugee

from East Africa), the loaded Mauser slung on my shoulder, we started to walk. The road ran through dense mixed bamboo and *sal* forest known to be the beat of the tiger who had claimed his last victim in that neighbourhood only ten days earlier. I realize now that it was a rash thing to do, as the rifle could have served no useful purpose in a sudden eventuality. It was an eerie and nerve-racking experience as every imaginary movement of a shadow felt like being stalked. But there seemed to be no end to this waiting for some form of transport to turn up, and the sun was so fierce that the prospect of a long trudge during daytime was not appealing. I was sorry for poor Anthony DeSouza whose feet had got sore and were bleeding from shoe bite while still many miles from our destination. But he could not be left behind to follow on his own with the bogey of a hungry tiger around, and he had to be hustled along in spite of his painful predicament. I reached Jagdalpur at about eight in the morning, having covered the distance in about six hours of non-stop marching, no doubt urged on from behind by the imaginary man-eater. The friendly manager of the bus company, one Mr Krishnaswami (or Krishnamurti?) provided us with a breakfast that remains memorable for the delicious home-made *idlees* with honey, which tasted like manna from heaven under the circumstances, washed down with genuine 'by-the-yard' Madras coffee. The manager soon provided a relief vehicle and his expert workshop foreman to tow the derelict station-wagon in, and after a couple of days of tinkering and hammering we were on our way again.

It is small wonder that even at that time, although the forests were in a less mauled condition than now, wildlife of every description had been reduced to such a deplorable state that a spate of man-eating tigers had begun infesting the region. The tribal Bhils, one and all, were expert trackers and all-year hunters with locally made muzzle-loaders and bows and arrows. In addition to this, there are the traditional pre-sowing *parads* or community *battues* every year in which all the able-bodied men from tribal hamlets miles around join to beat out vast tracts of jungle and slaughter everything that moves, big or small, whether mammal, bird or reptile. These hunts are to propitiate the spirits of the forest and ensure a good harvest, and the destructive practice continues unchecked in spite of prohibitory forest laws.

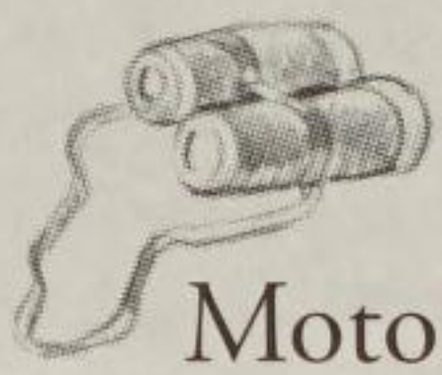
An example of the Bhils' expertness as hunters was given me by a tribal who I had engaged as a jungle guide during the Bastar bird survey.

Up till that time the magnificent Great Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*) was known to occur only in the Western Ghats south of Belgaum. The distribution given by Stuart Baker in the *New Fauna*, our standard reference book at the time, was 'Travancore to Belgaum on the western coasts of South India'. However, since its publication, the Gujarat bird survey had extended the distribution northward along the Western Ghats to the Surat Dangs (adjoining Khandesh). All the same, I was very surprised and intrigued to come across a large black woodpecker in a patch of overgrown secondary jungle in this distant part of central India, and was anxious to collect the specimen to establish its identity. The bird was excessively shy and alert, and kept moving away and from tree to tree, well out of gunshot. After half an hour or so of fruitless and exhausting chase, and afraid of losing the specimen, I offered my Bhil attendant a fortune of five rupees if he brought me that bird. The man took my gun and slunk off through the dense, thorny undergrowth. Within five minutes I heard a shot and in the next two the specimen was in my hand! He assured me that this large woodpecker—locally known as *Bhainsa-khidree*—was not very uncommon in that area and that both the bird and its squabs, avidly robbed from nest-holes, were very good eating—which made sense of the bird's inordinate shyness. Hornbills and other hole-nesting birds

Bastar Survey, 1948. Before the days of the four-wheel drive.
The station-wagon in trouble

were also becoming scarce for the same reason. The extension of the range of the Black Woodpecker, and some others hitherto considered predominantly Western Ghat forms, right across continental India to the Eastern Ghats, is among the significant findings of the Bastar/Kanker bird survey.

The adjacent 'native' states of the Eastern States Agency, which came next in my series of regional bird surveys, were Mayurbhanj, Badrama, Bamra, Korea, Keonjhar, Nilgiri, Dhenkanal, and several others. With their merger and reorganization they had all been absorbed in the adjoining states of the Indian Union, namely, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra and Orissa. In spite of the reckless damage done to the forests, particularly of the smaller states, by timber lessees and over-exploitation by rapacious forest contractors, the forest—mostly sal—were by and large in good condition, though large areas had been badly degraded through years of shifting cultivation (*jhoom*) which was the tribals' normal practice in the hilly tracts. Mayurbhanj was perhaps the largest and best organized of the Agency states and contained some magnificent forest with an abundance of wildlife. Simlipal, one of the finest game preserves of the Maharaja, is now one of our best-stocked tiger reserves.



Motorcycling in Europe

I have been an ardent motorcycle addict ever since I first rode the 3.5 h.p. NSU belonging to a Zerbadi friend, L.M. Madar, in Tavoy, soon after I arrived there in late 1914. My passion for motorcycles and motorcycling has grown with the years. Even after I was finally persuaded to retire from this form of exhilaration in 1964 at the age of sixty-eight, following upon several narrow shaves in the mounting chaos of Bombay traffic, and even after the wrench of parting with my last machine—a 1949 model 500 c.c. twin cylinder shaft-driven Sunbeam—I have never ceased to be thrilled by the sight and music of a BMW streaking past.

The first motorcycle I actually possessed—at least partly, since it was the property of our Tavoy business firm J.A. Ali Bros. & Co.—was in 1915. It was a 3.5 h.p. twin cylinder 'Zenith', a belt-driven machine without a gear box but with a clever device known as Gradua Gear, advertised as 'Invincible, All-conquering'. The device was intended to reduce the diameter of the driving pulley on the engine, by which a wide sliding range of gear ratios could be obtained between the high and the low. It was operated by winding a horizontal arm with a knob situated above the petrol tank in the manner of a tramcar's brake handle. Since then I have had Harley Davidsons (three models of different horse powers), a New Hudson, and others for short periods, and last and most beloved of all the Sunbeam on which I closed my motorcycling career. It is my everlasting regret that I never managed to possess a BMW to die happy!

In 1950 the BNHS, as whose curator and editor of publications I functioned since Prater and McCann emigrated abroad soon after Independence—the former to settle in the UK and the latter in New Zealand—raised a fund from amongst its members to meet the cost of sending me as India's unofficial delegate to the International Ornithological Congress in Uppsala, Sweden. This was the first to be held after the Second World War, which had badly disrupted international contact between ornithologists, and the reunion was looked forward to with joyful anticipation.

The Congress was to take place in June in Sweden since it was one of the few European countries that had escaped practically unscathed from the devastation of the War. The venue was the beautiful university town of Uppsala, the birthplace of Carl Linnaeus, the father of the modern system of biological nomenclature. I left Bombay by the P. & O. *SS Stratheden* on 4 May 1950, accompanied by the Sunbeam. On the latter I planned to do a grand tour of England and the Continent, visiting widely scattered friends retired from India, as well as nature reserves and places of natural history and conservation interest, especially related to birds. In spite of the gratuitous advice of well-wishers and the forebodings of doomsayers, the plan proved to be a wise decision, thoroughly worthwhile and enjoyable in every way, and above all a far less expensive and more convenient method of getting around than any other—especially under the rather chaotic post-War conditions of public transport at the time. It left me independent of time-bound

itineraries and forward booking of hotels, railways and buses, etc. that render last-minute changes difficult or impossible, and bind one down to the slavery of time-schedules. On steaming into Liverpool Street Railway Station from Tilbury Docks, where I had expected to be met by my ornithological friend and prospective London host, Meinertzhagen, I was positively bewildered by the sea of humanity that surged on the platform to receive the train-load, and was wondering to myself how the two needles would ever find each other in this vast human haystack.

Pushing and elbowing my way rather aimlessly through this motley crowd I noticed in the distance a tall thin figure, erect like a flagstaff, head and shoulders above the jostling throng. With his usual thoughtfulness and originality Meinertzhagen had hired a soapbox and installed himself prominently upon it; this is how we discovered each other! Meinertzhagen lived in a three-storeyed semi-detached Victorian building bordering Kensington Park Gardens, a once aristocratic locality, with his magnificent research collection of several thousand bird skins made in practically every corner of the world during more than half a century. The majority of the skins, prepared with his own hands with characteristic thoroughness and excellence, all meticulously labelled and catalogued, are a joy to handle and study.

It was early in the month of June and the famous annual Derby race was imminent. It was apparently a traditional ritual with Meinertzhagen to invite a number of his closest friends to picnic lunch and merrymaking with him at Epsom on Derby Day, and I was lucky to be in London in time to be included. Some twenty or thirty of us, young and not so young, male and female, were driven to Epsom Downs in a chartered charabanc and spent the day in sybaritic feasting and jollity, watching the races from the roof of the vehicle and cheering and shouting with the thousands of other spectators similarly positioned on bus tops and similar vantage points.

One thing about this Derby junket that is vividly fixed in my memory and with a sense of outrage, almost, is the brutally primitive toilet arrangements that were in operation. As can be imagined, on a cold windy day in the open there was a great

Sálim Ali collecting swallows, Assam, 1963

demand for this facility. There was a large unpartitioned *shamiana*-like marquee tent to which you got admission by paying 6d at the entrance. Within, you were faced with the unedifying sight of twenty or more men all lined up and unbuttoned, no semblance of privacy, and many more queued up behind, along a shallow runnel in the turf, all getting their money's worth of relief. Due to the briskness of business the runnel was overflowing its edges and by mid-day had already formed a snipe marsh of human urine through which all comers had to splosh their way to the line of action. This would be a disgusting exhibition of barbarism even among the most backward civilizations, and I must admit that it gave me a rude shock to see this in the homeland of the Englishman, who, in India, is usually so snooty about the unhygienic habits of the 'natives'. No, we couldn't beat this in India.

Apart from the superb collection of bird and natural history and big-game hunting books in Meinertzhagen's library—many of them first editions and collectors' items—I was particularly impressed by the unbroken series of his meticulously kept diaries since 1890 or thereabouts, each annual volume uniformly typed in an italic fount and handsomely bound in leather. The diaries record in detail not only Meinertzhagen's personal experiences and adventures as a wide-awake colonial military officer in the British colonies in Africa, but also his lively impressions of his contemporaries, official as well as non-official. The political and social conditions of the period, and candid—often pungent and not always charitable or unbiased—views and opinions on men and matters are also on record here. The diaries, moreover, contain a vast store of scientific facts and data gathered during his long military service, and on numerous scientific and hunting expeditions in Africa and elsewhere, which are invaluable as coming firsthand from an exceptionally keen and observant individual with a distinctly original mind.

After a week or so in England, during which I motorcycled out to a number of far-flung friends in the country in the fabulous springtime which is the glory of the English scene, I took a Swedish tourist ship to Gothenburg. After a night with friends of friends in the industrial city of Orebro, I arrived in Uppsala in the afternoon, just in time for the opening session of the Congress, to a mild sensation among the delegates and my friends at my wonderful timing, having ridden out all the way from India! I had fitted out the solo machine

with two bulky canvas pannier bags which carried an all-purpose wardrobe—including a black *sherwani* for formal occasions—much of which I realized too late was just redundant ballast. The bags could be unstrapped and carried to the hotel room on the night halts, but while convenient as containers, their weight disturbed the balance and produced a disconcerting tail-wobble which became quite dangerous when travelling at speed on the slippery cobbled road surfaces found in many small European towns and country villages. Among several unscheduled tosses on this account I recall a particularly nasty one before entering war-shattered Münster in Germany. The skid spun the motorcycle completely round and landed me sprawling in the middle of the road, luckily with only minor physical damage, not serious enough to interfere with the resumption of the journey. Luckily also, there was little following road traffic at the time to make matters worse: one of those gigantic delivery trucks, each carrying a dozen or more automobiles from factory to distributor, which always shook my composure as they thundered past on the autobahns, could at that moment of truth well have wound up the enterprise abruptly!

Greeted by David and Elizabeth Lack on arrival at the 1950 International Ornithological Congress, Uppsala, causing wonderment among some delegates at my timing, having 'ridden out all the way from India'

From the time of my first introduction to the fantastic breeding ground of the flamingo in the Great Rann of Kutch in 1944, this has been a bird of very special interest for me. At the Congress in Uppsala I had occasion to meet and exchange notes with several American and European ornithologists who were also flamingo fans and had read of my investigations at the Rann colony. I was naturally keen to visit the European breeding grounds in the Camargue (southern France) and in the delta of the Guadalquivir river in Spain to compare the ecological conditions. The doyen of French ornithology, Professor J. Berlioz of the Musee d'Histoire Naturelle, very kindly gave me letters of introduction to the flamingo warden in the Camargue.

Dr Luc Hoffman, a young Swiss ornithologist, fast oncoming then but internationally established now, who owned a biological research station later to earn international fame as Station Biologique du la Valat, extended hospitality and birding opportunities in the area.

Unfortunately, July is not the flamingo breeding season in the Camargue, but it was interesting to visit the site and examine the disused nests which were far more easily approachable than Flamingo City in the Rann of Kutch. In good seasons something like 7,000 pairs are estimated to nest in the Camargue. In 1945 the only tolerably reliable estimate that has so far been made of the Kutch colony on the basis of occupied nests showed approximately half a million birds in the Kutch population, including both sexes as well as downy and partly fledged young. That count did not include unhatched eggs still under incubation. Thus it is quite believable that the Kutch colony of the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) is the most populous in Asia, and may be almost the largest anywhere. For me the 1945 expedition to Flamingo City in Kutch is particularly memorable because it was the only one in several visits before, and many since, that I have been lucky enough to find the colony at the high peak of the breeding activities.

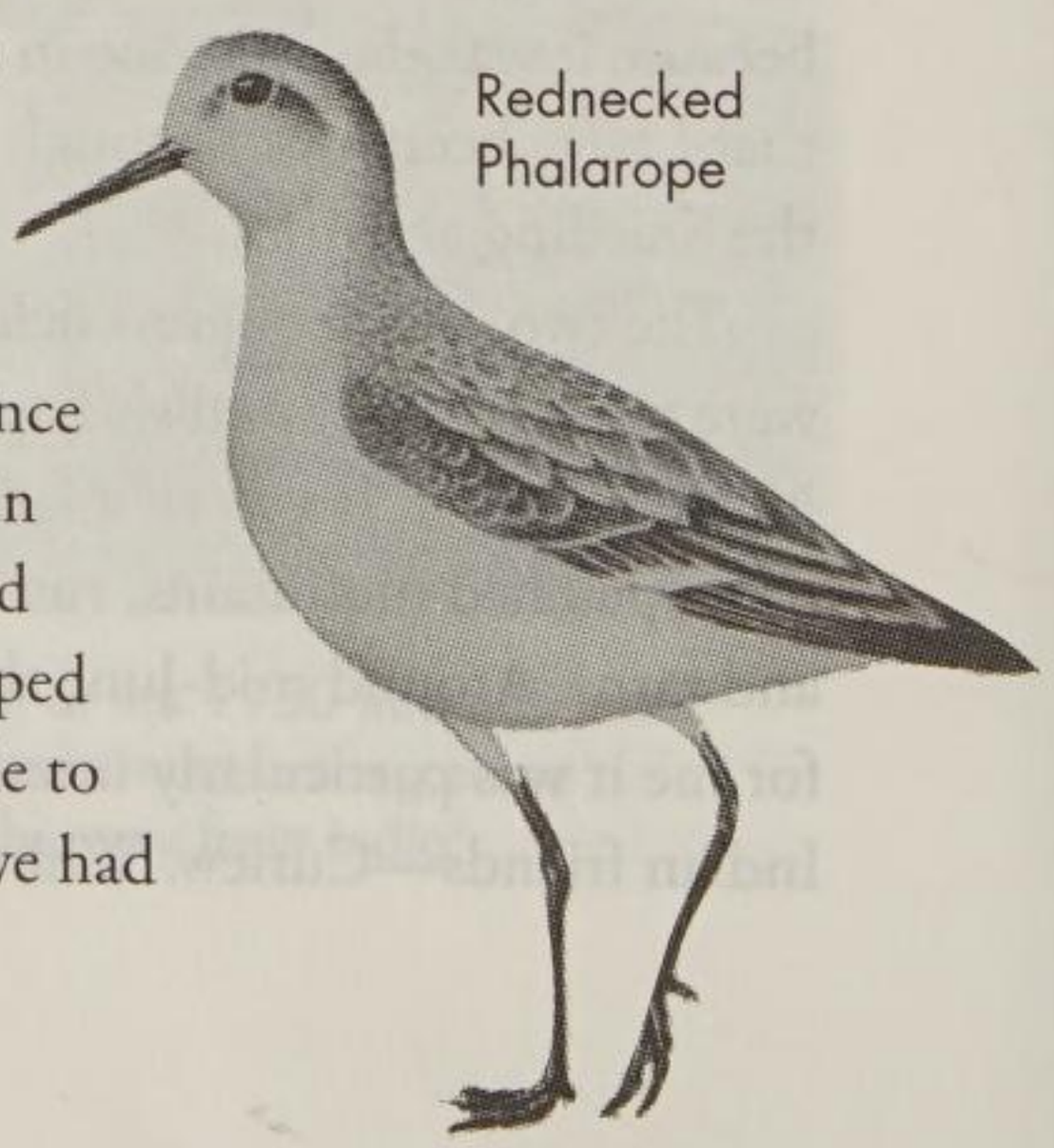
The two post-Congress field excursions from Uppsala I had chosen were to Abisko in Swedish Lapland and Riksgransen near the Sweden–Norway border. It was all a fantastic fairyland of superb scenery, of snow-patched mountains, rushing torrents and partially frozen lakes and tarns. Around mid-June the breeding of birds was at its height, and for me it was particularly interesting to meet some of our winter-time Indian friends—Curlew, Whimbrel, Rednecked Phalarope, Broadbilled

Sandpiper, the two Godwits and the two Stints—in their summer finery and on their Arctic nesting grounds.

At Abisko we were billeted in tourists' log cabins, one of which I shared with Peter Scott of the Wildfowl Trust, and Finnur Gudmundson, an Icelander and a giant of a man, perhaps the largest and most massive human in my experience. One of my pet aversions, and my idea of uttermost misery, is having to share a cabin or a tiny high-altitude tent with a robustly snoring companion. I had not met Gudmundson before and had no notion of his vital statistics or his potential as a snorer. Therefore when I first set eyes on him filling our little cabin with his gargantuan bulk my heart sank and I braced myself for a thoroughly miserable night. Happily the fear was belied: unbelievable for one of his size Finnur proved a considerate non-snorer. I found him to be a gentle and friendly soul and an excellent ornithologist, from whom I learnt a great deal about his fascinating homeland and its bird life.

I find that I have missed out much of the latter-day story of the BNHS, with which I have been so closely associated, particularly since my repatriation from Burma in 1924, and more particularly since India's Independence. It has been a period of great intellectual gratification for me personally, and also, I like to feel, of considerable significance in the progress of the Society and the proper projection of its image within the country and abroad. One of our greatest difficulties soon after Independence, during my secretaryship and as stop-gap Curator, was to find a suitable incumbent in place of Prater, and an Assistant Curator to replace Charles McCann—who should normally have stepped into the breach. Both of them had set a standard of excellence that was difficult to match. Thus, it was after a prolonged period of trial and error with several probationers that potentially suitable though inexperienced replacements became available.

Harking back to my own sorry experience of 1929, when I had wanted to specialize in ornithology for my future career and found no institution or university in India equipped to impart the proper instruction, I was able to persuade the University of Bombay after we had



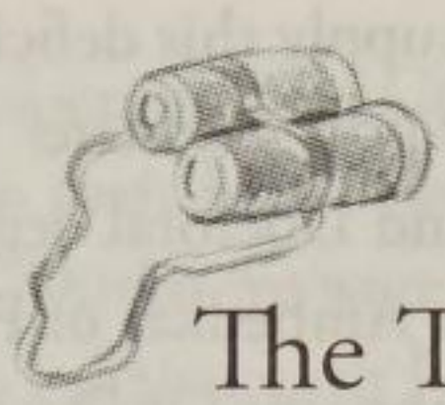
Rednecked Phalarope

acquired the necessary experience and expertise to supply this deficiency, to recognize the BNHS as the guiding institution for post-graduate research in Field Ornithology, leading to Master's and Doctoral degrees in Zoology. For my first M.Sc. student, Vijaykumar Ambedkar of Poona, I prevailed upon the University as a special case to appoint Dr David Lack F.R.S.[1] as a foreign external examiner for his thesis on 'The Ecology and Breeding Biology of the Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (Linn.)'. This was really more for my own satisfaction that my guidance was on the right lines. Dr Lack's assessment of Ambedkar's thesis was reassuring. After making some minor criticisms he said:

> Assuming that the standard for the M.Sc. of the University of Bombay is about the same as for English universities, I am of the opinion that the present thesis is worthy of the award, and well up to the standard required.... I found the thesis very interesting, very clearly written and presented, with a very good coverage of the literature of the subject, and with a sufficient amount of original research to justify the award fully in my view.

With a nucleus donation from myself, I initiated a fund under the BNHS named the Sálim Ali–Loke Ornithological Research Fund (SALOR). Its corpus of about Rs 3,00,000 was built up by donations from members and well-wishers of the Society, but chiefly by benefactions from the Loke family of Singapore, in memory of my close friend and fellow ornithologist, Loke Wan Tho, killed in an air crash in Taiwan in 1964. The interest on this corpus supports two postgraduate Fellows at a time for two to three years each. Latterly, a munificent grant from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust has enabled the Society to endow an additional Fellow for the period of his study. All this has been a source of great satisfaction to me, since the Society is now capable of producing adequately trained field biologists of a calibre otherwise difficult to find in India.

[1] Director, Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, Oxford.



The Thrills of Bird-watching

One of the standard questions I have inevitably to face is about what thrilling adventures I have had in a lifetime of exploring for birds. My standard answer must seem disappointing to those who expect to hear tales of derring-do. Ornithology as a hobby or profession or persuasion, whatever one may choose to call it, though full of adventures and rewards and disappointments, is by its very nature one of the most peaceable pursuits of the out-of-doors. It is certainly not lacking in excitements and thrills, though these may be of a different kind from what the normal enquirer expects. The excitement lies in ferreting clues and then following them up step by step to the discovery or confirmation of a fact or facts, of which one has obtained a suspicion or hunch. It was while living jobless in the seaside cottage of the Latif family at Kihim in 1930 that I got one of my most rewarding thrills of this kind when I fortuitously hit upon the first correct interpretation of the extraordinary breeding biology of the Baya Weaver bird.

In brief, the findings are that the male baya, who in his breeding livery is a handsome little sparrow-like bird, largely brilliant golden-yellow, is an artful polygamist. He may acquire any number of wives, from two to four, sometimes even five—not all at once in the harem style but one by one progressively, depending upon his capacity to provide them each with a home. The male alone is responsible for building the nest; the female has no hand in it. Males select a babul or palm tree to hang their compactly woven retort-shaped nests, and several males build together in a colony which may sometimes contain a hundred nests or more. At a particular stage in the construction, when the nest is about half finished, there is suddenly, one fine morning, an invasion by a party of females prospecting for desirable homes. They

arrive at the colony in a body, amidst great noise and excitement from the welcoming males, and deliberately visit nest after nest to inspect its workmanship, as it were. Some nests are approved, others are rejected. While the examination is in progress the builder clings on the outside, excitedly flapping his wings in invitation and awaiting her verdict. If the female is satisfied with the structure she just takes possession of it and accepts his impetuous advances. A hurried copulation takes place on the 'chinstrap' of the helmet-like half-built nest, and the pair bond is sealed. Thereafter the male resumes his building activity and soon completes the nest with its long entrance tube. The female lays her eggs within, incubates them and brings up the family. This is entirely her responsibility, and it is rarely—and only after his building impulse has finally subsided—that the male takes a hand in foraging for the chicks. Having completed this nest the male proceeds almost immediately to start a second one a few feet away. At the appropriate half-built stage, another house-hunting female may in like manner take possession of this second nest, and the whole process is then repeated. Thus the male baya may find himself the happy husband of several wives and proud father of several families at practically one and the same time. It sometimes happens that for some feminine foible, female after female fails to accept a certain nest. Undeterred, the male abandons the half-built structure and promptly tries again. In every baya colony there are usually to be seen a number of such half-built abandoned nests. This is the prosaic explanation for them and unfortunately not the more popular lyrical one that they are for the use of the male to swing himself and sing love songs to his incubating spouse nearby!

While the field study of birds, 'bird-watching' as it is popularly called, is a peaceful enough occupation, it is not entirely without occasional physical thrills and even hazards. In elephant-ridden jungles in South India for instance, I have frequently found myself in uncomfortably disturbing situations. A wild elephant, suddenly come upon at close quarters—a situation by no means uncommon in parts of Karnataka and Kerala—can be an unnerving experience, almost invariably resulting in the undignified spectacle, for the elephant, of the ornithologist in full flight in the opposite direction.

The diminutive Cochin Forest Tramway was proudly acclaimed in its time to be the cheapest run railway system in the country, or was it the world? I can well believe either. Its guard, complete with a once-white

uniform, the regulation white (once) sola topee, and whistle and flags, drew a salary of Rs 25 per month after his ten years of approved service, and its German-built engine (2 ft gauge) ran on fuel wood cut from the surrounding forest, often as it chugged along. In the 65 kilometres or so of its length from Chalakudi to Parambikulam, the track lay through some magnificent hilly country covered with bamboo and dense mixed moist-deciduous forest with pickets of wet evergreen here and there in the valleys and along streams. The tramway, originally laid by the Cochin Forest Administration for transporting logs from the interior, worked on a combined system of wire ropes, capstan pulleys, weights and counter-weights. The locomotive hauled the train along the flats and gravity did the rest on the inclines, some of which looked terrifyingly steep. The loaded down-coming trucks hauled the up-going empty ones by counterpoise, regulated by a brake drum at the head of each incline, of which there were seven or nine, as far as I remember. Normally the train carried no passengers, but when a forest officer on duty or some visiting VIP was travelling up the line a corrugated iron wagon like a horse van was attached, with chairs placed within.

This is how our Survey party travelled in 1933 to Kuriarkutti, where the government camp-shed stood close beside the track. The train was halted alongside the entrance to the compound and the baggage and equipment unloaded and transferred to the bungalow. It was great fun being hauled up the inclines with wire ropes that hadn't been renewed since the tramway was installed twenty or more years ago, and therefore provided an element of adventure that varied with the steepness of each slope. I remember how every now and again live cinders from the engine would come flying in with a cloud of smut and wood smoke and land on our baggage and clothing. Tehmina's sari and my shirt had several holes burnt through in this way before the journey ended. Forty miles in eight hours was good going; the next station beyond Kuriarkutti, Parambikulam, about eight kilometres away, was the terminus of the tramway, with a forest depot and timber yard, where all the logs were assembled and stacked for transport to Chalakudi.

My next journey by the romantic Cochin Forest Tramway was in February 1946, shortly before it was dismantled, alas, to make way for the gigantic Parambikulam hydro-electric project, with its huge dam and reservoir, which has completely submerged Parambikulam and all the lovely country around it. Enquiry confirmed that we were being hauled

up the inclines by the self-same wire ropes as thirteen years earlier, which knowledge made the journey feel distinctly more adventurous. We reached Parambikulam just as it was getting dark. In the verandah of the forest bungalow by the side of the tramway station I found a large squatted congregation of the local *adivasis* (Kadar), and in their midst, sprawled in one of those standard dak bungalow Victorian armchairs with legs splayed out on the extended arm-rests, a bare-footed 'topless' European male of sorts in crumpled khaki shorts.

We soon introduced ourselves. He was an Austrian anthropologist, Baron Omar Rolf Ehrenfels, incidentally a recent convert (of convenience?) to Islam, who had escaped to India just before Hitler's famous Anschluss, and was camping in the area to study the tribals. He claimed ornithology to be his second love and expressed great keenness on accompanying me when I went out bird collecting next morning. Led by a forest guard, armed with a .410 collecting gun and dust-shot ammunition, and followed by Omar, we were stalking single file along a narrow animal trail through dense tall grassland about five feet high—the right kind of habitat for the Broadtailed Grass Warbler (*Schoenicola platyura*), on which my thoughts were bent. Upon turning a bend in the path the forest guard suddenly ducked, excitedly pointing in front. I just glimpsed the head of a tusker elephant striding down the same path from the opposite direction, and turned to flee as fast as I could, motioning to Omar, who was ten yards behind me, to do likewise. I

V.I.P. Coach, Cochin Forest Tramway, 1933

don't know what he made of this gesture, but I have not seen anything react more quickly. He spun round with the agility of a cat and sprinted as fast as his long legs could carry him, looking neither to right nor left. The baron soon out-distanced me by a hundred yards, and it looked as if he would never stop running. He did so finally another hundred yards further, and it was only when I got up to him hot and panting that he breathlessly ejaculated in suppressed undertones, '*What* was it?' It was an amusing incident of which, as of the baron's speed and stamina, I am always reminded whenever I see a wild tusker looking at me! In this case the poor elephant had perhaps never noticed our presence. He veered away into the grass before reaching the bend and was not seen again.

Ornithology may sometimes even entail hazards of a different kind. I recall one particularly hair-raising incident along the Himalayan trail from Almora to the Lipu Lekh Pass on my way to Lake Manasarovar and Mt Kailas in 1945, a few years before the Dragon swallowed Tibet. It was at a particularly narrow part of the trail with a thousand feet of vertical scarp on one side and the roaring Kali river some 300 feet vertically down on the other. I had walked ahead of the porters while they were striking camp and was all by myself. Just at that moment a tiny bird—how well I remember that Yellownaped Yuhina!—got up to the top of a bush, some yards away on the flanking hillside. Just as I got it in the field of my glasses, it hopped a bit further up, so to get a better view I took a step back, with the glasses still glued to my eyes, and entirely unmindful of where I was standing with my back to the abyss. As I did so, I felt a small pebble slip from under my heel and heard a faint continuing clatter as it went rolling down the hill. Still unmindful of anything untoward I casually looked back over my shoulder to see what it was all about. What I saw literally made my hair stand on end. In a flash I realized that I was on the very edge of beyond—two inches more and I would have followed that rollicking pebble. The great

leap forward I made at that instant would have done credit to Mao's reforming zeal. I am wondering to this day what my porters would have made of my mysterious disappearance when they reached the end of the day's march and found me missing, since finding any trace of a vanished ornithologist in that rocky gorge of the tumultuous river would indeed have been purely accidental.

As a boy I had found it far pleasanter to be chasing birds in pleasant places than doing ridiculous sums in elementary mensuration in the classroom. Since then I have watched birds through half a century and more, chiefly for the pleasure and elation of the spirit they have afforded. Bird-watching provided the excuse for removing myself to where every prospect pleases—up in the mountains or deep in the jungles—away from the noisy rough and tumble of the dubious civilization of this mechanical high-speed age. A form of escapism, maybe, but one that hardly needs justification.

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Cover photographs: (front) Photograph of Jim Corbett (OUP archives); photograph (detail) of Verrier Elwin (OUP archives); and photograph (detail) of Sálim Ali (courtesy BNHS)

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